

A LONDON ROMANCE

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BY
CHARLES H. ROSS



AUTHOR OF "THE PRETTY WIDOW"



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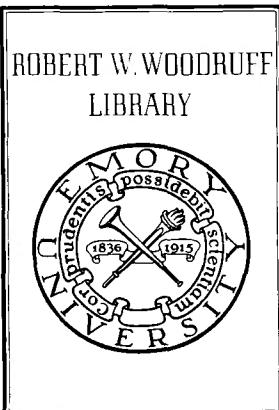
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AUTHOR OF

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A LONDON ROMANCE.

I.

IN A COURT BEHIND THE PLAYHOUSE.

CHAPTER I.

ONCE upon a time—not so very long ago—there was quite a little theatrical colony down Stonywold Court, at the back of the Great Sahara Theatre.

Mrs. Pounder, “old woman to combine heavies,” lodged at No. 4; Jinks, “second low comedy,” at No. 6; Mr. Montmorency, “utility,” and Miss Jenkinson, “singing chambermaid,” at No. 7; while Mrs. Whitaker, the stage carpenter’s wife, carried on a newspaper and cigar business at the shop at the corner.

Metropolitan improvements have done away with Stonywold Court these ten years past; but, once upon a time, if you had wished to make a short cut to it, from the box entrance of the Great Sahara, it would have been as well, perhaps, if you had taken the first turning on the left, when you would have found yourself in Little Pannikin Street, East, leading from which, upon the right hand side, between the Hilarious Hyæna (proprietor, Joe Marjoribanks, ex-clown) and Simpson’s famous Shaving Shop, was Blue Peter Passage, and, at the bottom of that, Stonywold Court. It is true that you might have got to your destination by an easier route, straight down “the Lane,” but, then, we were talking of short cuts.

Now, supposing your business to have lain with Mr. Whitaker, it would have been as well—had you not found

him lingering at the stage door—to have looked in, on the way, at the Hyæna, because Mr. Whitaker was seldom at home except on Sunday, so very busy was he at the theatre. If it were Mrs. Whitaker you came to see, you found her easily enough by entering the shop and tapping on the counter.

You found her, then, to be a spare woman, with a grievous expression of countenance, as of one who had troubles and made the most of them. You found her, also, rather sharp upon the subject of trade, and intolerant as regarded periodicals which she did not happen to keep, if you rashly enquired for the same. In a general way, too, she seemed to serve you under a sense of injury, and she was inclined to be disobliging in the matter of change. Otherwise, her manners were, if anything, distinguished, and there was about her, as the saying is, “something superior.”

If, however, you had not visited Stonywold Court for the purpose of seeing either Mr. or Mrs. Whitaker, but had come, instead, to see one of the younger members of the family,—in which case it is also to be supposed that you were a younger member of some other family yourself, and your object was a game of play—you would, during the summer months—if it were not meal time or bed time, or tub night, which began with weeping and wailing and soap in the eye at four on Saturday afternoon, so as to be got over early to allow for marketing—have been referred to a small concourse of little children generally to be found on Mrs. Whitaker’s private door-step, a favourite juvenile resort and sheltered corner from the north-east-wind.

Had not the little Whitakers formed a part of this gathering, loud cries would probably have arisen, responsive to your interrogatory, and Ann and William and James would, ten to one, have been found over against the pump in the middle of Stonywold Court.

Over against the pump, one heavenly summer’s day, the game of hop-scotch was at its height, and William Bradshaw, best known as Billy the Bold, and Ann Whitaker, otherwise called Tombboy, were trying their skill against that of Emma, Mrs. Higgins at the oil-shop’s eldest born, and Mrs. Praddles’s little boy from round the corner, while Jimmy Jarman the Moper sat apart and read his book.

It is an exciting game is hop-scotch, though ignored by the upper circles and discountenanced by Mrs. Whitaker,

who being, as has been seen, "something superior," set her face against street children, and their sports and pastimes.

It was, too, a wondrous sight to see that energetic little maiden—she would be eight next birthday, and was a great girl for her age—hopping nimbly upon one black-stockinged leg, and calling upon the "nicker" to "kim up" as she kicked it. But it is hard to see the fun in anything that pains you, however funny it may be to a third person to look on at. When you want to be still and read your book in peace and quietness, and other people come jumping on your toes, the annoyance is none the less because the leg that deals the kick is shapely.

If then you had happened to be a sedate and serious old person, aged ten-and-a-half, who had seen the folly of things and suffered sorely with the rickets, it could not be reasonably expected that you would care to join in such boisterous games. Thus was it with Jimmy Jarman the Moper. He did not care for hop-scotch. He did not care for rough games. He could not bear rough boys and girls: and Billy was rough, and Tomboy anything but gentle.

There then, he sat, this summer's afternoon, basking in a patch of sunlight playing on the pump; there he sat, this rickety, careworn old chap of ten-and-a-half, reading a penny romance as hard as he could, and from time to time in a weak voice complaining of little Ann screaming so shrilly, and of Billy bellowing like a bull.

Twice had Ann jumped upon his toes, and he had on each occasion backed his chair a little, complaining bitterly that nowhere else would suit her to come and play but just where the sun was shining. Once Billy had kicked the "nicker" up into his lap, and this had made him very angry. Once they had nearly knocked him over, chair and all. And, yet, they persisted in their play, and she of the shapely leg still called shrilly as ever upon the nicker to kim up.

Until at last (oh! woe and wailing to come) it kimmered up in a way quite unexpected, and went right through Mrs. Whitaker's shop-window.

Another minute and Stonywold Court contained but two of its resident juvenile population—Jimmy the Moper, who sat speechless in his chair, and little Ann, who had hidden herself behind him.

To them the smash very soon brought out Mrs. Whitaker, in a tremble of rage and terror, the flowers in her cap shaking portentously.

"Who threw that stone?" she asked.

But the boy to whom she directed the enquiry made no answer.

"Who threw that stone?" she asked again. "Are you a-going to tell me, James, or shall I have to make you?"

"Don't say it was me, Jimmy dear," whispered a small voice behind him.

But by this time Mrs. Whitaker's wrath was growing terrible.

"Do you hear me speak, Sir?" she continued. "Who was it that did it?"

"What will you do to them as did?" the old man enquired cautiously.

"I'll break their bones," said Mrs. Whitaker.

"But if I don't tell you?"

"I'll break your bones."

"You'd better break mine enough for both of us," said Jimmy Jarman, "because you'll never find out who the other is."

So saying he gave himself over into the hands of the tormentor, and, that afternoon, while the juvenile population gamboled, joyously, upon the flags of Stonywold, the unrepentant sinner languished in darkness and solitude, and, sitting among the coals in Mrs. Whitaker's cellar, played the part of martyr, with but short-lived sympathy from those for whose sake he suffered.

Not that we ought to blame that bright-eyed little maiden because an hour afterwards she was hop-scotching again as hard as ever. One's memory is so short in childhood's days: it is only when one grows up that the grateful recollection of past favours abides with us.

That evening there was tea-cake for tea because it was William's birthday, but James being a bad boy went cakeless, and his portion was divided between his cousins.

"And not a crumb shall he have," said Mrs. Whitaker, decisively, "because he's a bad un."

"Poor Jimmy," thought Ann, with a twinge of conscience. And she had half a mind to declare the whole truth, and deliver herself up to justice. But, then, what would have been the good of that? If she did so, she, too, would be

beaten : and Jimmy had had his beating, and, by this time, probably, had nearly got over it.

"I won't eat his share of the cake, though," she said to herself: and she begged of Billy to be equally self-sacrificing.

But Master William pulled a long face, and responded with his mouth full, "I sha'n't give him none, I'm sure. Why should I?"

"Because he was punished for my sake."

"More silly him then," said William : "serve him right."

"Does it, Sir?" cried Ann, irate ; "*you* wouldn't tell a story to save me a whipping, *I* know."

"No, that I shouldn't," said Billy, "not if you had been naughty. Nor if you hadn't neither, for I wouldn't tell a lie to save myself." And William, who was always a good boy, and, consequently, never was whipped, ate to repletion, and was happy.

"You're a nasty, greedy thing, though," said Ann ; "and if you won't give him any of your cake, I'll give him all the more."

"Oh, very well, Miss," said Billy, "then I'll tell your mother."

But, in spite of this threat, Ann carried out her resolve, and when, bed-time coming, Jimmy still languished in durance vile, the little girl watched her opportunity, and, creeping down stairs to the cellar-door, did her best to offer her captive cousin such consolation as lay in her power.

"Jimmy," she whispered.

"Who's that?" asked the prisoner.

"It's only me," replied the penitent little girl. "How are you, Jimmy dear? Are you pretty comfortable?"

"I aint very comfortable," responded Jimmy from among the coals.

"No, I know you're not, poor dear," cried Ann, wringing her small hands and whimpering through the keyhole : "but I mean, as comfortable as you can be."

"Yes, thank you," said Jimmy. "Don't fret about me."

"Did mother bang you very hard?"

"Rather hard," said Jimmy.

"I know you must hate me for not telling, Jimmy ; but oh—I was so afraid and—I've saved some cake for you."

"Thank you, dear. But don't you fancy I hate you. I don't care a bit, Ann, as long as she didn't beat you. Bless

you, I should be as right as anything here, if I wasn't so afraid of the beedles."

"I hope they won't bite you much, Jimmy dear, and I'll keep you your cake, and — mother's calling. Good-bye, Jimmy."

"Ann," cried the boy from the inside, as she was turning away.

"What is it, dear?"

"I wish I could kiss you. You are very kind to think of me."

"You can't kiss me till you come out," said Ann, "but if you'll kiss that side of the keyhole, I'll kiss this."

"Go on, then!" said Jimmy. "I'm a kissing of my side."





CHAPTER II.

AH me, but it must be a felicitous state of things when one is able to be always good and virtuous, without an effort! To have been good so long, too, that the stability of one's goodness is thoroughly believed in! And what a happy boy William ought to have been, and was!

The mothers of all the bad boys round the neighbourhood—and alas! it was a neighbourhood hugely prolific in bad boys—pointed to William's conduct as a bright example, worthy of their emulation, and asked them tauntingly, whether they ever supposed it likely that they would be able to become only half as good as he was.

Sometimes, though, bad boys, being likewise envious, lay in wait for William in lonely spots, thumped him on the back in a dark corner of Blue Peter Passage, and threw him on his nose in Little Pannikin Street, for no other reason than that he was a good boy, and they were bad ones.

But William the Good was also Billy the Bold, and in a fair stand-up fight was more than a match for any boy of his own weight in or about the parish of St. Starver-cum-bag-o'-bones, so that, perhaps, he was feared more than he was hated; and having a strong will of his own, and a strong arm to enforce it, he became a leader among the boys of those parts, and the cock of his court.

He was, of course, much more likely to be popular than his cousin Jimmy Jarman the Moper, for although the latter had the reputation among the unlearned of being a scholard,

and a fine reader, and an adder-up unequalled, he was not pleasant company. He knew so much better, you see, than other boys, and they did not like it.

He had a wonderful power of story-telling—not fibs, at which he was, perhaps, not such a bad hand, either—and he was supposed to know right off, by heart, the contents of Mrs. Whitaker's six shelves of circulating library. But then he required so much pressing before he would exhibit his talents, and, after all, listening to “a pack of tale nonsense” isn't as good fun as I spy hi, or buttons, even, and, as a rule, he could only get a lot of silly girls to sit and listen to him, for, as you know, girls are poor hands at games, such as strong boys of Billy's sort like to play at.

Little Ann, of course, preferred William Bradshaw to her other cousin, but she was an exception to the ordinary run of girls, and was, in William's opinion, making due allowances for the shortcomings of the sex, “not such a bad sort neither.”

What a happy childhood was this which these children passed in the shabby little court of Stonywold. It is to be feared, though, that, to a well-regulated mind, it must have appeared somewhat incorrect, and Mrs. Whitaker, for one, by no means approved of it. But it was awful jolly!

They thrived on smoke and dirt, these grubby innocents. They had scarcely ever heard tell of green fields, and had formed an unfavourable opinion respecting them. Many of the street children, about there, had never seen the parks. There was hardly one who could have taken its oath—they did take their oaths pretty frequently—to a daisy.

Some of them had wandered so very little from their native squalor, that they had no notion there were streets barely a mile off which could have swallowed up the court itself, Little Pannikin Street, and Blue Peter Passage, at one gulp, without fear of choking.

Jolly! Why, if ignorance is bliss, there were some of those street children, the young members of the Whitaker family were in the habit of associating with, as ignorant as infant Hindoos, and as happy as the day was long.

There was not much money circulating among the Stonywold children, you may be sure; and a halfpenny bundle of

firewood was considered a perfect godsend, in the way of playthings, and served equally well for dressing up as dolls, or building houses with, or for fashioning into cats when, the tip-cat season setting in with its customary severity, there was a great demand for that playful missile in St. Starver's.

The worst of it is though, deuce take it, that even little boys and girls must work ; and there was school to go to and lessons to learn, and such gettings up before you were half awake on cold winter mornings, and so much soap in wrong places when your face was washed, and such rough—you may well say rough drying, afterwards.

And, again, was it not a dreadful trial to be obliged to go to school, those bright summer mornings, when there were so many other boys and girls, who did not go, and could stop and play how they liked, and as long as they liked, out in the beautiful streets ? Why if you hadn't to go to school, there was that return match at buttons, coming off that very morning, between Mrs. Praddles's little boy, and young Mr. 'Iggins, also from round the corner.

There was, too, a Punch show at the Lane end of the court, and a drunken man, whom Joe Marjoribanks had just turned out of the " Hyæna," trying to pick his hat up, and not able to do so, in Little Pannikin Street.

Besides, as this was Saturday, all the penny-odicals were out, and Mrs. Whitaker's window was full of new pictures, if you had only time to stay and look at them. But you had to go to school, worse luck, and so had Jimmy Jarman the Moper, and Billy the Bold, and Miss Ann, alias Tomboy.

It was not, by any means, a charity school in which Mrs. Whitaker's young charges were educated ; because they were paid for, at the rate of sixpence a head per week, and they wore no muffin cap, and were not labelled. It was a sort of public school, though, much frequented by amateur lady teachers, who pounced down upon you when you least expected it, for your duty towards your neighbour, or dodged you, anyhow, in your multiplication table.

You were never quite safe, either, with the reverend gentleman who called sometimes in lavender kid gloves, [and who had puzzling posers handy, respecting fractional bloaters, and problematical relationships notably in the case of John's father and Tom's son, which no living boy in the

world could have answered, had he not first been told what to say, by some other boy who possessed an hereditary knowledge of the solution.

It was a trying school for William, who hated books, as much as a good boy can hate anything, and who was always being proved a dunce, and laughed at, and who, at times, waxed very wroth and, almost, became a bad boy out of sheer vexation. Somehow, though he strove hard, William was not as clever at his books as that pale-faced, shambling cousin of his, whose head was so large, and whose muscle was so small; and, sometimes, when Mr. Whitaker sat smoking his pipe, at home of a Sunday evening, he would try the two boys' powers, after a fashion of his own, generally, to William's discomfiture.

"James, my boy," perhaps Mr. Whitaker might observe, "let's hear you spell Virginny tobacker," and Jimmy Jarman obliges with the requisite information.

"Right you air," says Mr. Whitaker, checking him by the printed label he holds in his hand; "right you air, Master James, that's a chalk to you; and now, William, where do this Virginny tobacker come from?"

"From the right-hand drawer in the shop," replies William, innocently, at which rejoinder little Ann bursts out laughing, and Mrs. Whitaker, looking up from her needlework, joins in the merriment, but, discreetly, offers no suggestion.

"Where is it, Ann?" says Mr. Whitaker, with an encouraging smile.

"From America," says Ann.

"Right you air," repeats Mr. Whitaker; "and whō were it, William, as fun out Amerikey? Were it Capting Cook?" he adds, after a pause, looking rather anxiously towards Jimmy Jarman, for he is not, altogether, quite certain sure upon the point himself, "were it Capting Cook?"

"No," says Jimmy, with a curl of the lip, which the honest carpenter does not notice.

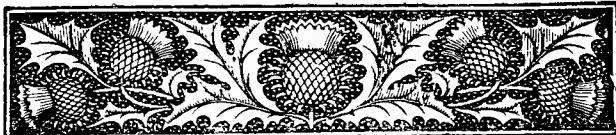
"No," repeats Mr. Whitaker, decisively, and as though he knew all about it, all along. "It weren't Capting Cook, because it were a little after his time. And who were it, Jimmy?"

"Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492," says Jimmy Jarman, as though he were reading from a book,

for, by accident, the young humbug has learnt it, at school, only a couple of days ago.

"Right *you* air, James," says Mr. Whitaker, patting him on the head with the bowl of his pipe, "right you air, and very kind it were of him. Christopheer Colom—Columni-bus it were, and how is Christopheer Columnibus spelt, Master William?"





CHAPTER III.

ALL this while, our young folks had been growing up, as fast as ever they could grow, and Mrs. Whitaker had begun to say, and kept on saying, for that matter, that it was high time James Jarman did something for a living, though what that something was to be she could not easily decide.

It was, not unwisely, suggested, by a friendly neighbour—Mrs. Praddles, if names must be stated—that a clerkship would best suit an adder-up of his ability, and Mr. Whitaker, in a vague sort of way, set about making enquiries. Pending the result, Jimmy, who seemed to dread a change, went on with his schooling. William, however, was only too eager to throw his books aside, and, having at a very early age displayed what Mr. Whitaker called a natural turn for chips, it was agreed that his father should try and get him on in the workroom at Great Sahara, at the end of the year's schooling, and that he and James should leave school together.

Before the end of six months, however, a great event occurred which revolutionised the parish of St. Starver's, and made, among other things more or less important, a wondrous change in the destinies of William the Good. This event was the arrival of a new shepherd at the chapel in Little Pannikin Street, East, *vice* another shepherd defunct; and the new comer was an earnest young man, with a loud voice and new views.

The advent of this reverend stranger caused a sort of small awakening in Saint Starver's, and there was such a run upon

the hard benches of his little chapel that grave thoughts of calling in the aid of an architect entered the heads of the elders. Under the influence of this good young shepherd's persuasive eloquence, Little Pannikin Street took a serious turn, which in one direction extended to the Lane, and in the other to Blue Peter Passage, and even reached Stonywold Court ; heretofore a black sheep among courts, and the abode of the frivolous and ungodly.

It is pleasant to think that Mrs. Whitaker was one of the earliest of the awakened. She had ever, on the Sabbath, been a regular attendant at chapel, during the old gentleman's time ; and James and Ann, suffering much from jerks in the joints, and irritation in the nose, had with difficulty shuffled and rubbed through many hot and weary afternoon discourses, which William, on the contrary, survived with credit.

Mr. Whitaker, it must be owned, was not quite as regular a chapel-goer as his good lady ; staying at home, when he could, upon various pretexts, more or less shallow, to smoke his pipe and read the police reports in his Sunday paper. But there was no such thing as shirking possible to the olive branches. As sure as Sunday came, came also Sunday clothes, very shiny and stiff, and tight under the arms, Sunday manners as stiff as the clothes ; hard benches, dry discourses, and a woefully long, wearisome desert of a day, with but two oases—hot baked meat for dinner, and seed cake for tea.

When the new shepherd arrived, though, these old-fashioned Sundays came to be looked back at as holidays and days of rest, compared to the Sabbaths of the awakening ; which grew at length to be periods of such rigidity and severity, with so much hard bench, joint jerking and nasal irritation in them, that James in the intensity of his suffering was heard to say that two a week would be the death of any boy.

To William, however, these Sundays contained nothing terrible, and indeed it was his custom to lecture his cousins upon their naughtiness, to keep them up to the proper pitch of wakefulness during chapel, and, generally, to take them to task, and set them straight, and call Mrs. Whitaker's attention to their shortcomings and backslidings. What was more natural than that so good a boy should attract the favourable notice of the new shepherd, and that he should take William by the hand, and promise Mrs. Whitaker to keep his eye upon him ?

Who, then, shall describe the joy and pride which agitated the good woman's heart? and who, but a thoroughly good boy, properly appreciate the benefit conferred upon our William when Mr. Wapshot (this was the shepherd's name) said that William himself should be brought up to be a shepherd—a shepherd with a flock of his own.

Under Mr. Wapshot's able tuition, then, did our good boy, from this time forward, make rapid strides in book-learning; such strides, indeed, that it began to be a question in the school and in the court, whether it would be William or James who would carry off a prize for which both were studying very hard. The odds (in copper) were freely offered and taken down the court, and Mr. Whitaker was in the thick of the betting, and, going upon the opinion of Mr. Wapshot (what better could he have had?) backed William heavily; though, at times, upon his own judgment, half tempted to hedge on James, who was, he could not help thinking, an onkimmon long-edged un.

But James was not the favourite. Hardly anyone was constant in his support, except, perhaps, it was Mr. Montmorency the walking gentleman; and, if anything, that seemed an unlucky augury, for he was proverbial for doing the wrong thing. Since that time he has married into the ballet, and grown absurdly fat and lost his figure.

Strange was it, though, that the court, generally, should have lost faith in the wisdom of the small sage, who, near upon a decade, had been quoted a scholard and adder-up unprecedented. Yet it, nevertheless, was true; and Mr. Wapshot's good boy was confidently predicted, by all Mr. Wapshot's flock, and by the little theatrical community—of whom, by-the-way, Mr. Wapshot, though not intolerant, was far from approving—as the future winner of the prize for English history.

And in all this, who was little Ann's favourite, think you? Perhaps, some tender-hearted one has, already, settled the matter, in favour of the pale-faced cousin who, so heroically, sacrificed himself to toko and the coal-hole in that affair of the broken window. Perhaps it should have been so; but how could that poor, rickety weakling be supposed to keep his place in a young lady's affections, against the superior attractions of William the Bold and Brave, with the blue eyes and curly locks? that great strong boy, who was cock of his court, and could punch the heads of half the youth of St.

Starver's had he so chosen ; who, moreover, was growing to be as clever as he was good, and, on Mrs. Praddles's authority, the "beautifulest singer" that ever gave voice to hymn. Besides, all the world—but, more particularly, the boy part of it—knows what silly things girls are ; and how can you expect little Ann should set up her opinion against the great majority of Stonywold Court, with such an authority as Mr. Wapshot at its head ?

Heartburnings, anger, and envy, arose out of this competition, you may be sure, and a dark shadow of anger and distrust crept stealthily into the stage-carpenter's little household, and fell upon the hearth, between the cousins. Very silent and surly sat Jimmy Jarman of a night with his books and his slate. He had been proved to be a horrible booby at arithmetic in spite of his groundless reputation as adder-up, and William, the good boy (he was as open as the day) had made no secret of the Moper's shameful failure in the multiplication table, and, subsequent humiliation, in a dunce's cap, upon a form.

The excitement was very great, among the good people of the court, when the day of the prize distribution drew near, for none could say, until the name was called from the platform, who were the victorious and who the conquered. But the Wapshot flock had placed their faith in their good boy, and mustered strong upon the front benches. Foremost among these was Mrs. Whitaker, with a toilet which did honour to the occasion, and an umbrella with a nozzle especially adapted for laudatory purposes. By her side sat a very demure little girl, in a new pair of cotton gloves with no stint of material in the length of finger.

Among the spectators was, also, Mr. Wapshot, with an unaccountable tendency towards chuckle-headedness when seen among other men, without the advantage of a pulpit, and upon whom the reverend gentleman in the lavender kid gloves, of a herring and a half notoriety, looked down, superciliously, with the aid of a gold-rimmed eye-glass.

A real member of Parliament had kindly consented to make a speech upon the occasion—he was very silent down in Westminster—and it was evidently a very clever speech, too, for nobody could understand it, and the member's wife, the most beautiful lady little Ann had ever seen in her life, whose bonnet was a thing of a fairy tale, gave away the prizes, and smiled an angel's smile upon the shambling boys

and girls who blundered up the platform steps when their names were called.

Many names were called that afternoon, and the distribution, with its attendant speeches, occupied several hours, so that it fell out that, by the time the prize for English history had to be distributed, Mrs. Whitaker was not a little irritable and hot. But now came the great event on which the odds had been laid heavily, these three weeks past, among the knowing ones in the court.

As the member of Parliament took the prize in his hand both boys half rose up on their seats, and their hearts bumped violently under their little waistcoats. The gentleman reading the names was, like some others among the audience, a little weary of the repetition of the ceremony so often recurring, and he read, carelessly, in not too distinct a tone, from the paper in his hand. But the name reached the eager ears listening for it, and it was William Bradshaw, followed by thunders of applause from the hands of Mr. Wapshot and his flock and good Mrs. Whitaker's umbrella's nozzle.

Yes, it was William Bradshaw who was called to glory, and who, with a flush of triumph on his handsome face, arose in a flutter and a tremble, and stepped briskly up the steps to where the beautiful lady awaited his coming with a sweet smile, a crimson-bound book, and a wreath of laurel. Oh, glorious victory, and just reward of industry! In all his career of goodness, he had never felt half as good a boy as he felt now, when the smile of conscious excellence curled his lip, and he could hardly believe it possible that he had ever, in his secret heart, quaked with fear, and felt by no means so sure of himself as Mr. Wapshot and his flock felt sure of him. A great victory was it, and a proud and happy moment, which you would not, surely, have dimmed by thrusting upon his notice the vision of that other, who sat, silent and motionless, among the applauding crowd. Does the triumphant general in the crowning moment of victory bestow a thought on the mangled wreck of humanity left upon the battle-field? No recollection of Jimmy Jarman's pitiful defeat marred William's happiness, as he strode onwards, amidst loud acclamations, whilst the sea of faces around seemed to dazzle and bewilder him.

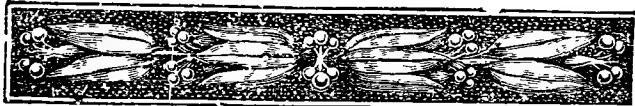
But, as he approached the table, as he stretched out his hand to grasp the coveted prize, a horrible shadow arose

between him and it, and horrible words thrilled through his heart, which, in the first bitter disappointment, seemed suddenly to stop beating.

"A mistake," one of the tutors was heard to say to the member of Parliament; and the member of Parliament, in a fluster again, consulted the list, and stammered and flushed and said, "Yes, yes, to be sure—a mistake, to be sure—bless me, I mistook the line. Certainly; I see—it is William Bradshaw who is honourably mentioned. A very good boy, Bradshaw. A very good boy, and, next time, I dare say he'll get it. Hum, ah, yes, James Jarman! Step this way, James Jarman. This is James Jarman, is it? Then here's your prize for English history."

It was, then, James Jarman's prize after all! Oh, horrible disappointment! Oh, endless steps, so difficult to descend! Oh awful sea of blank faces! Is there no outer darkness, no hole or corner, into which a poor, disappointed, good boy can creep and hide himself?





CHAPTER IV

HERE were certain important ceremonies to be gone through before James Jarman was at liberty to leave the platform and return to his friends, with his prize in his hand.

The schoolmaster wished to say a few words to him. The reverend gentleman was desirous of adding a few more, and the member of Parliament, not yet by any means too certain as to which was the right boy, after all, said what he had to say to altogether a wrong boy, who was moved to tears by his exhortation.

The prize for English history was the last to be given away, and the hall was fast emptying of its hot and weary audience. When James reached the place where he had left Mrs. Whitaker and little Ann, he found it vacant. In the distance he caught a glimpse of Mr. Wapshot looking warm and angry, and conversing, earnestly, with one of the elders of his church, an austere cheesemonger of Little Pannikin Street, who had, also, looked somewhat shyly upon the youthful sage, in consequence of his novel-reading propensities. Upon any other occasion, James would not have dared to address either of these great persons, but, breathless and excited, he now burst in upon them with an "Oh, Sir, if you please, Sir."

"Well, James," replied Mr. Wapshot, in freezing tones.

"I—I, Sir was going to ask, Sir——"

"Well, James."

"I beg pardon, Sir, but I've got the prize, and—and——"

"Well, James."

Colder than ever, was the tone of this last rejcinder of his unsympathising auditor, and the half-smiling, half-crying look which Jimmy's face had worn whilst speaking, gave place to a dismal blankness.

"I—I wanted my aunt, Sir. I beg your pardon, Sir, I—I—"

"I am not your aunt, James Jarman," said the shepherd; and then, he and his companion continued to stare hard at the luckless sage, until, with a supreme effort, like that of a bird striving against the fascination of a snake, he wrenched himself, as it were, out of the depressing presence, and hurried from the building.

But his friends were nowhere to be seen: they had missed him, probably, and gone home. He felt very much disappointed that they had not waited for him, but, still, he was sure it was an accident, and he set off, at a brisk pace, for Stonywold Court, expecting to overtake them by the way.

Of course, it must have been an accident, he argued with himself. Of course it must, and he would be received with open arms when he reached home. The odds before alluded to, of course, had not been laid against him in his presence, nor his failure prophesied, by Mr. Wapshot and his flock, to his face. Yet, somehow, he had, long ago, arrived at a faint glimmering of the truth. He was not the favourite.

He felt sure of that, but the fight had been a fair fight, and they must praise him, since he had been victorious. Mr. Whitaker would praise him, he was sure, if Mrs. Whitaker did not; or if neither his uncle nor his aunt awarded him a kind word, there was one whose approbation he valued much more than theirs. Anyhow, Little Ann would be glad; but, after all, when he came to think of it, all must rejoice at his success.

At least, as William had not got the prize, it was much better that he should have gained it than that it should have been carried off by some strange boy, some outsider not mentioned in the betting.

All the afternoon the sun had been pouring down upon the hot streets. As he turned his face towards home, however, the sky seemed to him to become, suddenly, overcast. There was a cold gray shadow in Stonywold Court, and, somehow, a chill crept up to his heart, as he came within sight of the shop window. Involuntarily he slackened

his pace and presently paused, irresolutely, upon the very threshold.

As he did so, William's voice fell upon his ear: the good boy was blubbering aloud, as well he might, at his sad disappointment.

"It wasn't fair," the poor boy whimpered piteously; "I say it wasn't fair; they'd no right to give it to that fool, they hadn't."

"No more they had, my dear," said Mrs. Whitaker, consolingly; "but worst luck, they did; so don't you fret yourself no more about it."

"Oh! how you talk, aunt," replied William, naturally smarting under a sense of injury, "just as if I could help being in a rage to be treated so unfair."

"It's a great shame, William," cried Mrs. Whitaker, indignantly, "and I don't mind who hears me say so."

Though she little thought who did hear her, worthy soul.

"Don't cry any more, Billy, dear," then said a gentle little voice, which, it was very evident, belonged to a little girl shedding sympathetic tears; "don't cry about it, Billy; for you know we all love you, ever so much better than if you had half-a-dozen of them nasty prizes."

"Oh, don't you go on about my crying, Miss Wiseacre," retorted William, who surely had good reason to cry, and so, no wonder he could not be very just. "What do girls know about what a fellow feels when he's done out of his due?"

"I am sure I feel for you very much, Billy, dear."

"You're just as glad that James has got it."

"I'm not so glad, I'm sure," replied little Ann through her sobs, and, perhaps, she to some extent lost sight of the truth in this passionate outburst. "You are very, very unkind to say so, for you know I love you a hundred times more than him, and I'm very sorry he has got the prize, I am."

So they were all sorry. Jem himself began to feel anything but rejoiced at his success. But he had got it, nevertheless, and could not unget it again, and, so, what was to be done? There the matter ended—so far.

But, what next? What ought he to do? He still stood close outside the door, leaning his arm against the doorpost and resting his head upon it. A strange confusion of feel-

ings agitated his breast, and his eyes were filled with blinding tears.

Presently, a movement within the shop startled him. He felt that he could not bear to speak to anyone just at that moment, and he started back, as though he had received a blow ; then ran, with all the speed he was capable of, out of the court.

It came on, at this juncture, to pour with rain—or it had been raining for some time past, he was not certain which—but he kept running on instead of seeking a shelter, so that when, at last, he stopped for want of breath, his clothes were wet through. Then he had only got as far as Little Pannikin Street, and he could not rest there.

He must run far away to some place where no one would be likely to find him. He was scared, out of his life, lest somebody should see him in this state of agitation. He never wanted to see any of them any more. They, none of them, wanted him. No one cared what became of him. He was in the way. He had no place in the world. He would be better out of it.

He kept on running as long as he could ; but such a poor, weak wisp of humanity was not likely to do so very long. Then, he crouched in a doorway until he shivered with cold, and set off again, walking, fast to keep himself warm. Thus he wandered, far away from the court ; but, as twilight set in, he once more turned his face towards home.

It was pitch-dark when he arrived, at last ; and he heard the sound of all their voices in the parlour, behind the shop.

“They’re having supper,” he said, as the rattling of crockery reached his ear. “I’m dreadfully hungry ; but I don’t care. I won’t eat their food, any more.”

Of a sudden, the shop door opened. Jimmy shrank back, into the darkness. Mrs. Whitaker had come out to look for him, and she peered up and down the court, and shaded her eyes with her hand. “Whatever has come to that boy ?” James heard her say ; and then, Mr. Whitaker’s voice was heard, grumbling, within, and she closed the door again.

Most of the doors in the court were closed, it being supper-time and the night chilly. The windows were lighted up, and he could hear the laughter of women and children in a house near to him.

Presently an organ-grinder, one of those who are such a nuisance to studious people, working late, to make up half-pence enough for his night's food and shelter, came down Blue Peter Passage, bringing with him what seemed to the sorrowing boy a sweet melody, tender and thrilling ; listening to which, his heart laboured painfully, and he burst into a flood of tears. A costermonger's family, being of another way of thinking, the stop was changed at their desire, and the last new music-hall melody jingled, briskly, whilst some ragged brats kept step to the tune.

Over against the pump, where his white face was hidden in deep shadow, the miserable child sobbed as though his heart would break, and, in a wild and impotent frenzy of grief, called upon God to take away a life which was a misery to him.

But supper being by this time over, many of the court folk came to their doors, and Jimmy, fearful of being seen, crept up the passage and ran away again. As he turned the corner, something hard in his coat-pocket struck against his hand, and he recollects that he was still carrying about the prize book which was the cause of all his wretchedness. In a fury he now dragged it out, and tore from it the white paper covering.

"I won't take that away," he said. "They can have it if they want it. I wish I'd never seen it. There!"

With all his might, as he spoke, he dashed it down upon the ground, and raised his foot to trample on it, when a voice in his ear stopped him.

"Why, whatever are you a doin' on? And aint there just been a hullybaloo along on you neither."

It was Mrs. Praddles's little boy who spoke, and who, now, stooped to pick up the book. "What a shame!" he said, "to shy about a thing that aways."

"Bob," said Jimmy Jarman, taking hold of his arm, "don't you say you've seen me. At least—stop. I'll tell you what you shall do. Will you do it?"

"What is it?"

"Here's a penny, Bob. I haven't any more, but here's a magnet as well—a capital one, worth ever so much. You shall have them both if you do what I want you."

"It aint anything to get me into a row, is it?"

"No, no; it is only to take that book to my cousin Ann, and to give it her from me, and to say I don't want to keep

it away from William if she thinks he ought to have it, and that I'm going away, myself, for ever, and they'll never hear of me any more, and I—I——”

But he broke down here and burst out crying, and then, without finishing the sentence, ran away, leaving Mrs. Praddles's little boy, from round the corner, in blank amazement.

“Well, I'm blowed!” said Mrs. Praddles's little boy, and perhaps he was; but, henceforth, this history does not concern itself with his welfare.





CHAPTER V.

FT is one thing to run away, and another to keep it up. Before now, loving couples have made a runaway match of it, and run all the way to the next street, where they took furnished lodgings, and waited, hopefully, until the remorseless relations could be pacified ; and there is on record a case of elopement in which the elopers were caught and brought back because the bridegroom, to save expense, took a twopenny omnibus to the railway station instead of chartering a Hansom.

Our young friend ran away, as hard as he could, determined to put the width of the world between him and his enemies ; only, when his wind failed him, he was compelled to slacken his pace, and, before he had even half-traversed the width of London, he was so faint and weary, with the day's excitement and exertion, that he was fain to take a long rest upon a doorstep, down a lonely City lane.

He had no idea of going anywhere in particular, and no fixed plans for the future. One or two wild schemes had crossed his brain, one of which was to go back at midnight, creep in at the window, and shoot his rival dead, whilst he slept ; but the great drawback to this plan was that he had not got a pistol, and no other sort of weapon suited his fancy.

Then, the idea occurred to him of posting a letter to Mr. Whitaker to say that he had drowned himself, and that his last prayer was that Heaven might forgive his persecutors, only he had got neither pencil nor paper, and no money to buy them. Therefore, both these desperate deeds were

abandoned, and, for the present, he took a nap upon a door-step.

The lane was one of those running down to the river, near London Bridge, upon the north side of the Thames, and it was at this hour very still and lonely. The heavy boots of a far-off policeman, growing fainter and fainter as he went upon his way, seemed to make the silence he left behind him, when he at last became inaudible, quite death-like.

It was a narrow, crooked lane, on either side of which were high warehouses, dark and silent, blocking out light and air. Afar off, the boy fancied that he could detect the sound of the sluggish water, washing against the slimy stonework of the quay, which he had noticed, some twenty yards from where he sat.

Almost opposite to him, was one of those quaint, old city churchyards, pinched in betwixt two gaunt brick buildings ; and the moonlight, stealing in through the gap, gave a ghostly shape to a dilapidated tombstone which the boy could catch a glimpse of between the rusty iron railings, changing a squat urn into a demon's head, and the handles into huge ears.

So very still and dreary was the scene, that Jimmy Jarman, having rested himself, began to grow rather timid, and was half inclined to continue his running, when the door behind him opened suddenly, and some one coming out fell over him, exactly as the shopman does in a pantomime, when the clown knocks at the door and lies down in front of it, to trip him up.

The person whose acquaintance he made, under these somewhat unfavourable circumstances, was not very long in improving it, by slapping Jimmy's head. Seemingly, finding solace in this occupation for his own bruised bones, he slapped it once more, and then, clutching its owner by the collar, shook him till his teeth chattered again, and he, himself, was out of breath, when he paused, and surveyed Jimmy distrustfully in the gaslight.

By a certain unsteadiness in his speech, when he spoke, and in his legs, when he tried to stand, it was easily to be seen that James's assailant was the worse for strong liquor. He was an old man with silvery locks, and would have been venerable only that his purple nose rather spoilt him. He was, also, an unsavory old man, with such damp and

mouldy raiment—all a long way off fitting him,—that an imaginative person might almost have fancied that he fished for drowned men in the Thames, and appropriated their wardrobe.

Setting himself straight, now, after his late exertion, he seemed to wrench himself round in his clothes, so as to get his waistcoat buttons in a line with his chin.

"That'll teach you," said the old man, when, at last, he had breath enough to speak. "Don't try it on again!"

"What have I done to you?" gasped Jimmy, smarting under something more than a sense of injury. "It wasn't my fault!"

"Never you mind whose fault it was," retorted the old man, with a dignity which a hiccup seriously interfered with. "Don't do it no more, that's what I advise you, and don't tell none of your lies to them as is old enough to be your father."

As James Jarman was not anxious to incur another visitation from the old man's fist, he attempted no further remonstrance, but mentally prayed that his assailant would go away. He, however, showed no sign of that being his intention, for he was still standing there, feeling in his pockets.

"I know I had a sixpence somewhere,' he said, in a reflective tone. "I'm certain I had a sixpence,—if it had been a three-penny-bit,—but it couldn't be that—unless I changed it; and if I did change it, I don't remember, and as I don't remember, perhaps I spent it at the same time. Anyhow, I'm sure I did have sixpence!"

He fixed Jimmy with a watery eye as he thus soliloquised, and the boy began to be very much afraid that he would be called upon to supply the loss.

"That's all my luck, that is," continued the old man presently. "I tumbles down steps as nobody else's luck would stick in the way. I tumbles over ragged wagabones, as is only born to break the heads of honest coves as unlucky as me. Nobody but had my luck would be servant to sich a master as Hankershanks, when it's me instead should have the land and houses myself that Hankershanks has got this moment in Bloomsbury Square. But listen to me——"

In throwing himself into an attitude more suitable to the coming revelation the old man lost his balance, and sat

down in the gutter. When he had picked himself up again, he seemed to have forgotten all about his lost sixpence and his ill luck, and, shaking his fist at Jimmy, who was watching him in fear and trembling, he struggled up the street, now and again cannoning off the wall against a street lamp, and cannoning back again, until, finally, he pocketed himself, as it were, round the corner.

When he was clean gone, the boy sat down again to rub himself and rearrange his collar and neckerchief, which the old man had torn and crumpled. He did not intend to stay very long, though, for fear his late assailant should return and again belabour him, and was rising to go when something lying on the pavement caught his eye. He stooped, and picked it up ; it was the sixpence the unlucky old man had dropped.

Jimmy Jarman stood undecided. He had some notion of throwing the money down again and walking away. He never dreamt of appropriating it. Should he wait for a time, and see if the old man returned, and give it to him ?

His time was his own. As he was going nowhere in particular, it could not much matter when he got there. He therefore, once again, took up his position on the doorstep, and waited, patiently. He was very weary, and closed his eyes for what he intended should be five minutes, and fell asleep. He slept nearly a couple of hours, and, when he awoke, immediately began to cough.

He had been dreaming that the chimney was smoking at home, and now he was awake the smoke was still there. But it was not from a chimney. It came, on the contrary, through the crevices of the door against which he was leaning. The door, too, felt very hot, and beneath it shone a bright light.

Jimmy got up, and ran out into the road to look up at the windows with a frightened face. Then, ran back to the door again, and, this time, could distinctly hear the crackling of wood and the roaring of flames within. Almost at the same moment, the old man came back, much more unsteady than he had gone away, and Jimmy, in a horrified voice, told him that the house was on fire.

"The housh-a-fire ?" the old man muttered, indistinctly, pressing his trembling hand to his muddled head and gazing around him in bewilderment. But then, the truth dawning on him, all at once, he seemed to sober himself, as

though by magic, and clutching Jimmy by the throat, pinned him panting against the wall.

"You, you have done this. You have set it alight," he said in a hoarse whisper. "You've done it to ruin me!"

"It's not true," replied the boy, half choked. "Don't strangle me. I tell you I didn't do it!"

"Why are you lurking about then? Why are you hanging round the place?"

"I found the money you dropped, and stopped to give it to you. Let me go and fetch some help. See, the flames have got into the floor above."

"No! no! Stop where you are. Be still, or I'll twist your young life out of you. Be still. We must get away. They'll say I did it, else."

"Let me go for help, or the house will be burnt down. Let me fetch the gentleman you spoke of from Bloomsbury Square."

"What, Hankershanks? No—yes. Perhaps that will be best. But see here; don't say you saw me leave the place two hours ago. I'll unlock the door, and say I was asleep in bed when the fire broke out. Come! do you swear to Heaven you won't tell what you saw? Swear, or I'll throttle you now."

Indeed, it seemed as though the old man had concluded that such a course would, perhaps, be the best, for his fingers tightened more and more in the boy's twisted neckerchief, and Jimmy Jarman, with the blood rushing in a torrent to his head, began to feel his senses were leaving him.





CHAPTER VI.

“Leave go of me, will you? Leave go of me!” gasped the boy, struggling in wild terror, and then, breaking loose from the old man’s clutches, he shrieked out, “Fire!” and “Murder!” with all the strength of his lungs.

In freeing himself he lost his balance and fell heavily to the ground, but next moment he was on his feet again, and the next running, at full speed, up the crooked lane, awaking a hundred echoes in its lonely houses by his piercing cries.

He ran along until he reached a leading thoroughfare, where there was still much traffic, and there, breathless and bewildered, he began to ask his way to Bloomsbury Square. Bloomsbury Square was a long way off, and the road to it difficult to find, for he was too confused to re-collect the directions which passengers gave him, and had, over and over again, to retrace his steps.

When, at last, he reached his destination, there was a still more difficult task to perform, which was to find Mr. Hankershanks’s house, the number of which he had neglected to enquire. He asked everybody he met. A policeman on duty, the waterman at a cab-stand close by, the loiterers in the street.

It was, at last, from a doctor who by chance came out of his house, that he obtained the desired information; and presently was pulling with all his might at Mr. Hankershanks’s bell—a harsh, jangling bell, which sounded very loudly, as though there were no furniture in Mr. Hankershanks’s dwelling.

Repeated ringing brought, at length, a head in a nightcap to one of the upper windows, from which a voice, as harsh as the bell and, moreover, slightly cracked, demanded what the ringer meant by making such a disturbance.

"Is this Mr. Hankershanks's?" asked Jimmy Jarman.

"What if it is?" retorted the man in the nightcap.

"I want to see him, if it is."

"I won't see anybody to-night. Go away!"

"It's very important, Sir!"

"I don't care what it is. I'm not well. I'm out. I'm gone to bed. Call again to-morrow."

"To-morrow, Sir, will be too late. It's your house on fire, Sir, in the City, and I should think it's nearly burnt down by this time."

The head at the window popped in so suddenly upon receipt of this alarming intelligence, that, in the action, the nightcap, scraped off by the frame of the lower sash, fell down into the street. There followed a moment's silence after this, and, then, a scuttering sound, as though some four-footed animal were descending the stairs, but which, instead, proceeded from Mr. Hankershanks's slippers, very much too large for him.

A very haggard, hard-featured old man, in a dirty dressing-gown, carrying a flaring candle, opened the door, stretched forth a thin arm, grasped Jimmy by the collar, dragged him inside the house, slammed-to the door, and pinned him up against the wall.

"You atrocious young scoundrel, what's these lies you've been telling me?"

"It's the truth, Sir," said Jimmy, who, this evening, seemed, in all conscience, to have quite enough to do to tell it and take the consequences. "I've run all the way, Sir, and it was blazing when I left."

"You'll be blazing too, you young villain, before you're done with," said the old gentleman. "Who are you, and who sent you, and who did it? But never mind, hold your tongue, and don't waste any more time. Come up stairs with me while I get on my clothes. I sha'n't lose sight of you, you young miscreant, till I know the truth."

Dragging Jimmy by the collar, as he might have dragged a large carpet-bag, and bumping him unmercifully by the way, the old gentleman mounted the bare stairs to an upper story, and entered an apartment which appeared to serve as

bed and sitting-room. There, having threatened his life with a bootjack, the old gentleman stood Jimmy in a corner whilst he dressed himself; and then collaring him once more in the carpet-bag fashion, hauled him down stairs to the street, where he hailed a passing cab.

They drove rapidly enough through the empty streets, until they almost reached the top of the lane down which Mr. Hanks's warehouse was situated, and there a great crowd stopped the way—a great scrambling, jostling assemblage of greasy rags and patches, some of the outpourings of the back slums and alleys lying hidden away behind the merchant princes' premises—an unknown, unseen world of squalor, the extent of which could only be guessed at upon such occasions as the present.

A lurid glare in the sky lighted up the little City church and the grim churchyard, with its gaunt white stones, and its neglected mounds, on which the long weedy grass, "the uncut hair of graves," bristled and quivered in the scorching heat. The fire sparkled in the black windows of the high warehouses. The mob swaying to and fro, but more like the writhing of snakes than the roll of an angry sea, blocked up the street at either end—a dense, dingy mass, with a white fringe of upturned faces; until, with a thundering tramp and clatter and gleam and glitter, the fire-engines scattered the people, right and left, like chaff before the wind.

An awfully strange and terrible night, this, to the trembling boy, whom the gentleman, still holding in custody, had dragged to the spot—a horrible dream made up of flames, shouts, screams, deafening noise and choking heat—a score of conflicting terrors; foremost, and above all others the most terrible, the vision of an old man bare-headed and with torn clothes and naked breast, alternately imploring mercy and threatening vengeance. He was released, at last, from Hanks's clutches, and was, now, in the front ranks of the crowd, driven backwards and forwards, and thrown from side to side like a cork in a tempest, till, all at once, there was a loud cry of "Make way! make way!" and another engine, with vengeful gleaming eyes, came thundering on, and then a sudden rush, a shriek, and he was dashed to the ground,—the world went out and all was blank and dark.

"A boy, Sir, run over, Sir."

"What boy?"

"A blackguard boy, Sir, please Sir."

A very muddy boy, a ragged and vagabond boy, evidently. But no; on inspection, a boy with some signs of respectability, with a clean shirt, and boots with some soles and heels to them.

"I know the fellow," said Mr. Hankershanks. "Is he much hurt?"

"If you know his friends," said a young man who was kneeling by the boy's side feeling his pulse, and who removed a meerschaum pipe from his mouth to make the reply, "if you know his friends they had better be sent for. He's got his marching orders."

It was not, however, Jimmy's fate to receive his death-blow thus, as his mother had hers before him. They carried him to the hospital, where, for many days to come, he hovered 'twixt life and death.

"Have I been very ill, Ma'am?" he asked, one morning, of the hospital nurse, who came to his bedside.

"Yes; but you're not well yet, and you mustn't talk."

"No, Ma'am, I only wanted to know, please, how long I've been here."

"A week."

"Has Ann—has anybody been to see me, Ma'am?"

"No. Be quiet."

But there was no need to tell him this. He had no other questions to ask. She had not been to see him. They did not care what became of him. Perhaps they thought he was dead, and they were glad of it. Why was he not dead?

He turned his face round on the pillow, so that the nurse might not see the tears in his eyes, and he bit his lips to smother his sobs. Poor little wretch! life was very hard with him just now.



CHAPTER VII.

GNE day, a gray-haired old gentleman, hard-featured, and of a sour and discontented aspect, came through Little Pannikin Street, past the Hilarious Hyæna, up Blue Peter Passage, into Stonywold Court, and paused at its entrance to enquire for Mrs. Whitaker's shop.

The infant population, arising as it were as one child, volunteered shrill information profusely, and presently he found himself in Mrs. Whitaker's shop, where he knocked with his knuckles upon the counter.

Coming forth, in answer to this summons, with that discouraging expression of countenance with which it was her habit to meet enquiries for new publications she had not "taken up," the good lady found herself facing Mr. Hankershanks, of Hankershanks Bros.

"Have you a nephew of the name of James Jarman?"

"I had."

"What has become of him?"

"He was a very bad boy, and ran away."

"He is dead, perhaps."

"I hope not; but we don't know where he's got to."

"I suppose you have taken some trouble to find out."

Upon this, Mrs. Whitaker described at length how she had run about asking, here and there and everywhere, and how other persons had run about, also, and how no clue could be obtained to the truant's whereabouts, and how it was supposed he had in all probability gone to sea, a course of conduct common with bad boys, under like cir-

cumstances. Hankershanks listened, impatiently, and at last interrupted with—

"No matter what you did. The boy's alive, you'll be glad to hear, though it is a miracle he has lived through it."

Mrs. Whitaker was very glad, she said, but had no time to ask particulars respecting James's illness, having, herself, so many to give regarding her efforts to find him. Interrupting again, more impatiently, Mr. Hankershanks went on to say that James Jarman had done him a service, and he was willing to testify his gratitude by making the family some return.

"I employ a good many hands," he said, "in my warehouse. I could give a sharp young fellow a good chance, if he chose to stick to his work. I don't care to be in any one's debt. I owe your family one, and I'd like to pay it this way."

Mrs. Whitaker received the offer with a certain amount of suspicion, which, perhaps, was not unnatural; for one doesn't look for this eagerness on the part of debtors to discharge their liabilities, unasked. But when, at length, she was assured of the sincerity of his professions, an idea occurred to her.

Here was the opportunity she had long been looking for, the opportunity of providing for William genteelly.

"I have a second nephew, Sir," she said. "A really good boy, most studious, with fixed religious principles. If you were to ask Mr. Wapshot——"

"But why not this other fellow?" said Mr. Hankershanks in a pig-headed way.

"It is very kind of you, Sir, but William—I am sure if you were to see Mr. Wapshot."

"Hang Mr. Wapshot! Why shouldn't I take the other fellow?"

When Sam Whitaker came in from the theatre, he had the case put to him by his good lady, and, at a glance, saw what ought to be.

"If William had a berth in such a house with a chance of rising, he *would* rise. There would be no keeping a boy like that down. Most likely he'd come to be a partner in course of time—more than likely."

But yet, Hankershanks, more pig-headed than ever, kept on singing the same old song, "Why not the other fellow?"

William Bradshaw was a son of a sister of Mrs. Whitaker's, who had married unluckily, and whom, Mrs. Whitaker had always insisted, it was the very least Samuel could do to provide for, under the circumstances ; more especially as he already provided for James, who had no claim on him. James Jarman was the son of Samuel's sister, but this sister had not exactly married unluckily, not, indeed, having married at all ; only wished to very much, and was rather too confiding.

When Hankershanks came to hear the history of James Jarman's mother's death, he found it was in this wise,—commonplace enough, in all conscience, a sort of death, indeed, which is somewhat hackneyed in story-books, where it happens, very frequently, to the mothers of heroes :

A winter's night. A pale and ragged woman, wandering, footsore and famished — a ragged woman, weary of struggling to live, weary of living, weary of herself and the world that had been so hard on her,—heart-broken, crushed, and spiritless. Not hungry, only bitterly cold, and wretched, hopeless and sick unto death.

Such a wanderer, houseless for eight long days and nights, creeping forth, upon the ninth day, from some back slum, where she had dozed away the last few hours of day, mingled with the busy crowd in a great thoroughfare.

It was, then, a young lord's cabriolet—so runs the legend—but, perhaps, the title was thrown in for effect, for such things are done sometimes, even by the most trustworthy historians—it was at any rate a cabriolet, which, in an unlucky moment, swept, like a whirlwind, round a corner, and, bearing down upon her, before she had time to arouse herself sufficiently from her walking dream, to decide which way she ought to run, hurled her bloody and senseless in the mud, where she lay until they picked her up, a bundle of greasy rags with a ghastly face and a naked arm, long and fleshless, showing very white in the gaslight. Then it was—so runs the legend—a doctor's little boy carrying a basket with, if you will, the anxiously-expected mixture for a baby in convulsions, who saw it done, and who with the Misses Tag and Rag and Masters Bobtail whom the accident soon collected, followed the policemen carrying the wounded woman on a shutter to the station-house, and stood, awestruck, without the dread portal, banged to in their faces.

It was Hardstaff, of the double X division, who picked her up, and who, with that wondrous faculty of seeing to the bottom of things, with which policemen alone are gifted, pronounced her, off-hand, to be intoxicated, and shook her well and bade her bear in mind that he would not put up with any of her nonsense.

It was the inspector, taking down the night charges that evening, who, though agreeing with Mr. Hardstaff that it was decidedly "a case of drunk," thought that it might, also, be a case of broken bones, and so, humanely, sent the ragged creature to the hospital.

It was Jack Rabid, an operative "on the strike," who said he thought the whole affair was monstrous, and asked whether this was a Christian country, and who was, very properly, moved on and warned by Mr. Hardstaff that his character was well-known to the civil executive, and that he had better mind what he was up to.

Lastly, it was the mother of the hero of this book—herself the heroine of one of those stale old stories of disgrace, dishonour, and desertion, by far too stale a story to be here related—who, dying that night in a London hospital, left behind a poor, sickly little wretch, with no right to its father's name—a miserable weakling who, had it pleased God to take him away then, would never have been missed by living soul. But it was not to be, and he lived—to what end?





II.

DOWN A CROOKED LANE.

CHAPTER I.

HXCEPT that it was a noisy business, and a hot and dusty business, somewhat too stifling and choky, and with a tendency to weaken lungs and whiten faces, it matters little to the reader or writer of this history what Hankershanks's business was. Whatever it might have been, however, it was, seemingly, of a character necessitating unreasonably early hours in the morning and late hours at night — vast quantities of dust and a large amount of noise and confusion.

The hirelings at Hankershanks's had, at all seasons, a hot and jaded air, and were always in a hurry. At any time, during business hours, overheated men were to be seen running, feverishly, in and out of Hankershanks's premises, and up and down the lane leading thereto, for the most part mopping their heads as they went: and though, elsewhere, other fellows might be said to put their whole souls into their employer's business, souls and heels too were worn out in the exhaustive service of the house of Hankershanks.

A sort of intensity of expression was, also, a peculiarity of the persons in this employment, which, notably, increased under the eye of Hankershanks himself, whose presence indeed imparted an impulse of uncommon energy to every one within reach of his eye.

It was not a place, however, where much shirking was

practicable, under any circumstances. There was not the ghost of a chance of a surreptitious pipe round any corner on the premises ; for, round every corner, somebody was always coming full-drive, wiping his head as he came.

When the midsummer's sun was hottest in the straggling lane without—in which animate nature was represented by a shrivelled ancient, dozing in the porch of the little church, and a vagabond dog, as fast asleep upon the flagstones in front of it as the fates and the flies would permit—the house of Hankershanks was hard at it.

In the drowsy afternoon-time—when the scene, riverwards, with its murky waters creeping, sluggishly, past the moss-grown stones of the disused landing-place, the moored lighters with deserted decks, the black, bubbling mud, stretching far out where the tide had left it, looked at its deadly-liveliest—the house of Hankershanks was harder at it still.

Hard at it, as ever, throughout the livelong day, banging and clanging, and bumping and thumping, far away into the still night, long after the other warehouses down the crooked City lane had put their shutters up, and sent their work-folks home to the four quarters of the town.

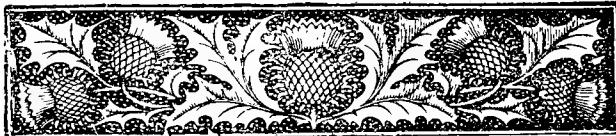
Hard at it, often enough, for some time beyond the nominal hour for closing, till, in fact, it pleased the all-powerful Hankershanks himself to knock off work and go his way, when, his back being turned, the strained muscles slackened instantaneously, the expression of interest faded away, and, with something of a guilty, hang-dog look about them, the Hankershanks creatures crawled homewards, dejectedly.

But rare rollicking dogs were some of these at the bars of far-away suburban “pubs ;” crack hands at pool, knowing ones in the dry skittle ground, familiar “regulars” in the “body of the hall,” constant visitors, at half price, to the pit of the theatre, indefatigable disciples of Terpsichore at the casino. Up to a thing or two were these—wide-awake, “all there,” “no green about them !” who saw a deal of life on reasonable terms, and would have gone the pace, fast and furiously, had not the scale of salary in the house of Hankershanks been of the lowest.

Milder and more timid, another set of clerks taking their pleasure in less feverish pastimes—in the round game and rubber of domestic life—the cup of tea and the little music ;

and there were rare instances, quoted as awful examples, where the utterly reckless among them had fallen in love, got married, and even gone as far as to have families, though not without some fear and trembling, we may reasonably suppose, of Hankershanks finding it out, and putting a stop to it.





CHAPTER II.

ACERTAIN young gentleman in Mr. Hankershanks's office, one Frank Pickering by name, tall and slim, eighteen years of age, and the only son of a widow lady in the fancy goods line, was one of those who fell in love after business hours, and took his fellow-clerk, James Jarman, into his confidence.

It may not be necessary to fall in love, the cynical would have us believe ; but, having so fallen, the necessity for a confidant is imperative ; and so Frank Pickering, casting his eyes around in search of a sympathetic soul, looked approvingly upon James's sad pale face, and one evening Jimmy became aware that commonplace creation was brightened by the presence of an Evelina.

Upon Frank Pickering's way home—James was carried out of his way by the length of the communication, which he had not the courage to interrupt—certain disclosures of a fragmentary character were made to James Jarman respecting Miss Evelina Hickson, which, James proving a good listener, were, upon future occasions, repeated ; partaking, after a time, of the nature of a narrative that embraced the minutest particulars (with the exact dates) of Mr. Pickering's first meeting with the loved one, during festivities in Mr. Hickson's front parlour, the plighting of their troth on the first-floor landing, their first quarrel on the kitchen stairs, and the reconciliation in the back garden.

To the hypercritical these little details may seem poor and paltry, and the limited sphere of action indicated in this record of the course of Mr. Pickering's true love, lead the

supercilious to suppose that there is little of romantic incident, deep passion, or exalted heroism to follow ; but wait a while.

From Mr. Pickering's description of her, James Jarman, unused to the flowery terms with which true love adorns its rhetoric, was prepared to find Frank's Evelina superlatively beautiful, and burnt with impatience to behold her. Was she dark or fair ? he asked.

" Oh, very dark," said Mr. Pickering, " with great black eyes and raven tresses."

" Tall or short ?" asked Jimmy.

" Oh, very tall," answered Mr. Pickering, " and very cold."

" Cold ?" repeated Jimmy, with a vague notion of imperfect circulation.

" Cold and proud, I mean," continued Mr. Pickering, " very proud ! A splendid creature, and worthy of a prince. But it can never be."

As, however, he did not clearly explain whether the impossibility was his own marriage or the prince's, James, with some diffidence, questioned him upon the subject.

" No, it cannot be ; her parents will not listen to it."

" No ?" said Jimmy, interrogatively.

" No, it will never happen with their consent, and without—"

" She would not run away ?"

" She could not."

" Couldn't she ?"

" Of course she couldn't. Didn't I tell you she was an invalid, and generally lay on the sofa. It's something the matter with the spine."

This something the matter with Evelina's spine proved a serious obstacle in the course of Frank Pickering's true love, for it rendered it almost impossible ever to obtain an interview with the young lady elsewhere than in the parlour containing the sofa of which mention has been made, and in the presence of one or both of Miss Hickson's parents, two or more sisters, and, occasionally, a distant relative or a neighbour dropped in to tea.

At these times, too, it was customary for the other persons present to maintain a dead silence during Frank's visit ; for the most part, fixing their eyes upon him, and watching his every movement with a most embarrassing persistency.

Chafing somewhat under this state of things, it not unfrequently happened that when Frank got a chance of spending half-an-hour alone with his Evelina, the priceless moments were wasted by the lovers in unprofitable bickerings.

Indeed, it must be owned, by an unprejudiced third person, that Evelina was somewhat wayward and unreasonable, when the publicity of the interviews is considered, in expecting that Mr. Pickering should say many tender things to her. Nor, indeed, with fairness, could his powers of conversation be fairly judged of under such circumstances ; but Evelina was most exacting.

Thus, if for a moment he was silent, she would say, "What are you thinking of, Frank?" If for a moment he took up a book from the table, before he had well opened it she would ask, "What is it interests you so much?" Or, again, "What ails you to-night?" or, "Something must have happened," or, "Frank, you are keeping something from me."

It was, therefore, in a measure, necessary that Mr. Pickering should be spasmodically lively during these visits ; though not too lively, either, as, in that case, his levity was apt to have a contrary effect to that desired ; and Evelina, bursting into tears, would wonder how he could have such spirits, and wish that she, too, could be so gay and light-hearted.

"She has money of her own," Mr. Pickering one day said, when talking of the future ; "and, though I would a thousand times rather she had not a penny in the world, I hardly think that, otherwise, my prospects at Hankershanks's would have justified me in proposing ;" and, as his salary was fifty pounds a year, with only a problematical rise of five pounds at Christmas, it must be allowed that there was reason in what he said.

Oh, how they loved each other, these two young hearts ! —to distraction, if not further ; and many tender epistles passed between them ; those from dearest Frank mostly written during Hankershanks's time, with the aid of Hankershanks's stationery.

A clandestine correspondence was this, unknown to Evelina's parents, who, it should be stated, had never exactly forbidden the match, because, in fact, Mr. Pickering, dreading refusal and subsequent banishment into outer

darkness—that is to say, outside Mr. Hickson's street-door—had never summoned up courage to break the matter to the young lady's papa.

But their troth, as we have seen, was already plighted, and in their letters Evelina was ever his, and Frank was hers to death, and they were both one another's to all eternity. To keep up a secret correspondence with a carefully guarded invalid young lady, was, as may be supposed, no very easy matter, and it could hardly be expected that so great a passion (they call this sort of thing a “grand passion” in French) could accommodate itself to the limited dimensions of Mr. Hickson's back parlour.

That there was something between their Lena and that young Pickering, ere long became evident to the watchful mamma, who presently intercepted some of the correspondence, and dearest Frank was called upon to make an explanation. Then came the blow, and all was

DESOLATION

AND

DESPAIR !!





CHAPTER III.

T may seem dreadfully cruel to those who, happily, know but little of life's trials, that Hankershanks, just about this period, when Frank Pickering's cup of bitterness was brimming, should have made himself more disagreeable than usual.

It was, however, true ; and this the very moment he selected for finding out that Mr. Pickering's handwriting was not what it ought to be ; and, for some time, he seemed to be, almost hourly, discovering yet another and another blot in that young gentleman's ledgers.

To have to listen to a rating upon the subject of a smear of ink, among Hankershanks' paltry accounts, when all was a weary blank in the world, was agony indeed ! But to be told, when he came in the morning, after one of those awful nights of sleepless misery, that he had better look sharp and set about his work, for he had done a precious little for the last fortnight, and Hankershanks was not going to pay people for nothing !

Then to be aroused out of the dream of what might have been, to carry a message ! To have to be light of heel when he was heavy of heart—to be obliged to struggle with a sickening despair, and to take care his balances tallied to a farthing ! Oh ! these were sufferings too great to be endured, and, yet, they had to be endured, or he would lose his situation.

During this awful time, the pale-faced clerkling from Stonywold Court was, more than ever, taken into Mr. Pickering's confidence, and was, also, taken unreasonable walks, in

a north-easterly direction, upon an empty stomach ; for Frank would often make a pilgrimage to Holloway, and feast his eyes upon the window of the parlour he must never enter more. At other times, James was taken to tea in a little room at the back of the fancy repository, where he was introduced to a mild old lady, the relict of a departed Pickering, who on earth had been a tide-waiter, but was now in heaven.

" You are my dearest Frank's dearest friend," she said, when first they met. " He is always talking about you."

James alone with his friend, very seldom spoke upon any other subject than his Evelina ; but he might, perhaps, have another subject for other people—for instance, Hankershanks—and, perhaps, for his mother. She, too, however, appeared to be well posted up in the last particulars relating to the long and mournful story.

She, too, had heard extracts from the loved one's letters—they were in a tangled handwriting, almost impossible for any but loving eyes to unravel—and had seen the loved one's daguerreotype, from which she had partially faded—a very faint young lady indeed, with no outline to her nose, and a bluish mark, like half a flash of lightning, across her left eye.

James Jarman behaved himself with propriety during these visits, consuming large quantities of muffins, and absorbing his share of moisture in the shape of scalding tea.

A well-conducted, quiet youth, according to Mrs. Pickering's opinion ; and he certainly did what was expected of him, which was to sit silently and listen whilst the good lady and her son did the talking. Mrs. Pickering's subject was not, however, always Evelina. Generally, indeed, she descended, at length, upon the merits of dear Frank.

" And he is worthy of any lady in the land," she said with enthusiasm, to which Jimmy responded in the same tone, " Oh he is, Ma'am ! " for Frank was one of the greatest heroes of modern times, in the eyes of his young friend.

Save for brief digressions, upon the subject of her annual attack of neuralgia, and occasional reminiscences of the dead and gone tide-waiter, Mrs. Pickering, almost always, entertained James Jarman with the fertile theme of dear Frank.

In course of time, Jimmy learnt that when first the great Hickson business came upon the carpet, Mrs. P. was a little

disappointed at the selection that Frank had made, for he might have looked higher, she had thought; and until it became a certainty that the beloved one had a little money of her own, the good lady could not help feeling rather uneasy about the future.

"I can always keep house for them," she said, "and thank Goodness my dear Henry's misfortunes taught me to be a good manager, for the poor thing's back will never allow her to take an active part in the household duties."

One day in the miserable time there came a parcel sent by hand, and this being opened, was found to contain a pair of Berlin wool-work slippers, worked by the loved one's own fair fingers.

"Oh, look, mother! Look! Look!" cried Frank in raptures. "See what she has sent to me. Bless her!"

"They're very smart," said the old lady, putting on her spectacles to look at them.

"They're lovely," cried Frank, "and oh, to think that she should have taken all this trouble upon my account. Why they must have been months in hand, mustn't they, mother?"

"They'll make up rather short, I'm afraid," said the old lady, who had been silently taking measurements; and she was correct in her supposition, for dear Frank had a good pair of serviceable feet of his own, and he also had good large hands and ears; which should never have been mentioned in this history, had not this circumstance occurred to necessitate a disclosure of the truth.

"Why, mammy dear," he cried out, "do you think I'd ever be such a brute as to wear them? What! trample her dear presents under foot? I ought rather to wear them next my heart."

He did not do this, however, which would in truth have been an inconveniently romantic proceeding, although he certainly carried about in his breast-pocket one of the loved one's bell-rope curls, and in preserving it, wore to rags several of Hankershanks's strongest envelopes. He loved her very dearly, this fine young fellow with the large feet; and was it not natural that his good old mother should, also, love what he loved, loving himself so much?

One awful night, never to be forgotten, Jimmy came by appointment to a little entertainment (a tripe supper, it may be stated, though in a whisper too low for ears polite), and

heard that the blow had fallen,—that Frank had been sent to the right-about, and that Evelina could never be his. In an agony of grief the poor boy lay upon the sofa—he had on his muddy boots, but this was not a moment to think of such trifles. He was sobbing bitterly, and tearing his hair, and ever and anon, he beat his head against the back of the sofa in a way that was terrible to behold.

“My own dear Frank,” his mother cried in pleading tones ; “for my sake do not give way like this. For my sake, bear up, my dear boy, bear up !”

“I wish I was dead,” said Frank in a hollow tone.

“Oh don’t say that, my darling.”

“Why should I live ? It would be better if I were dead and done for.”

Indeed, why should he live any longer under these distressing circumstances ? A mother’s life’s devotion was insignificant when contrasted with that other love, that grand passion for the slender beauty with the languishing black eyes, and the weak back. It seemed as though his wish for death were soon going to be gratified, so wretchedly ill did he look, for some days, after that dreadful night. There were no more tripe suppers, after this, you may be sure ; at least, no more for Frank, whose appetite Mrs. Pickering appealed to through the medium of sweet-breads, roasted pigeons, and such like delicate tit bits. Daily he grew thinner and thinner, more and more wan and woe-begone.

“You’re too slow for me, young man,” said Mr. Hanks, who was not in love himself, and wanted his work done. “You must sharpen up a bit, or go about your business.”

At these unfeeling words, Frank, scowling darkly, clenched his fist in a determined fashion, and seemed upon the point of knocking Hanks over among his merchandise.

But, happily, he restrained himself. One must necessarily put up with a good deal from those who pay our wages, and take at times a stray kick kindly, grinning and bearing with as pleasant a face as may be.

“I’m not long for this world, Jimmy,” said Mr. Pickering, one evening, when they parted at the door of the fancy repository. “You’ll come in as often as you can, old fellow, when I am gone, and try to comfort my poor mother.”

“Of course I will,” said Jimmy, deeply affected. “But I say, don’t, please, talk like that. You—you will get over it.”

"Get over it!" shrieked the other with a strident laugh.
"Heavens! how you talk! As if I ever could forget!"

As if he ever could! As if anybody ever did get over it, and take on about somebody else! As if our widows could ever smile again, and forget us; our children grow careless of our memory—as if the world, at large, could possibly get on more comfortably without us, when the mound has sunken and the grass grown thickly over it!

At this time, however, when things appeared to have well nigh reached their worst, there came a glimpse of sunshine through the clouds. Nothing less than a letter from the Hicksons, requesting Frank's immediate attendance.

But after the first few moments of joy, a dreadful thought came over him. Something must have happened. He ran in wild grief and terror to the loved one's house, and upon its threshold the servant told him that the young lady was dying.

He found her lying at death's door, and her relations gathered around, mourning as though she were already dead. But at the sound of her lover's voice, she turned her poor aching head upon the pillow, and smiled on him faintly.

"Do not grieve for me," she said. "And you, mamma, do not blame yourself. It cannot be helped now. We shall meet again, in heaven."

There was a hushed silence in the room, in which the wretched father's watch was heard to tick with an awful distinctness in the depths of his fob.

"Oh! why, why did we do as we have done?" the mamma sobbed by the bedside. "Do not go yet, Lena. Speak to her, Frank. Your voice may rally her a little."

He left the room at last, on tip-toe, leaving her asleep, and thinking never to see her again, in life.

He himself came home, more dead than alive, to that silly old mother of his, who, you may be sure, did her best to soothe him with gentle words and tender caresses.

As though the cup of bitterness were not full enough, there came the next day another cruel blow; this time dealt by the hand of Hankershanks the unrelenting.

It was a rule of Hankershanks's house that every clerk should be bound down under heavy penalties, upon a stamped document of ten folios, to hold himself in readiness,

should he be called upon to do so, to go to the branch establishment in Jamaica, there to take the place of other clerks whom "the fever" had promoted to a happier sphere above.

Of the contents of this alarming document, signed in some nervousness by the new clerks and their friends, a hazy recollection only was retained by those concerned in it. But, as far as they could remember, it would appear that Jeremiah Hankershanks on the one hand, his executors, administrators and assigns, and So-and-so on the other hand, his executors, administrators, and assigns, did jointly and severally agree, and whereas, moreover, otherwise, and be it further agreed upon, in consideration of, hereby, without prejudice to the rights and remedies of the said Jeremiah,—in witness, etc.; though as to what the rest might be about they had only the very vaguest notion, except that somebody forfeited three hundred pounds in case the clerk did not fulfil the engagement he thereby entered into.

At this moment another vacancy had to be filled in the branch establishment, and Hankershanks looking round to see whom he could best spare, decided on sending out Frank Pickering. When he heard the awful news, poor Frank gasped for breath and clung to the office stool for support.

He went home to his mother, who from the first glance at his face knew that something terrible must have befallen him. But she little dreamt what was the nature of the calamity.

She had supposed that if he were ever to go away, the hour of departure was yet far distant. She had cherished a hope, too, that her Frank would be an exception to the rule, and that his services would always be retained at the London establishment. But the time had come, and there was now no help for it. He must go and take his luck in Jamaica, or go about his business altogether.

"Is it not hard?" he asked his bosom friend, "at such a time too! when her dear life is hanging by a thread. Oh, if this had not happened, she might have recovered, we might even have been happy. *That wretch is her murderer!*"

He burst into a violent fit of weeping at the thought of what might have been—of the inexpressible happiness, irrecoverably lost.

It was night time, and he and Jimmy were talking together in a gloomy City lane where there were few passers-by to observe them. One evil-disposed boy, however, caught sight of Frank's tears, and thrusting his knuckles into the corners of his eyes, bellowed out, it is to be presumed, derisively, "Boohoo ! boohoo ! who's lost a farden ?"

The news of Hankershanks's fell decree caused a relapse in Minerva Place, just when favourable symptoms were manifesting themselves.

"You have killed her now," cried Mrs. Hickson ; "you should not have told her. How could you be so cruel ? You could never have loved her."

"I not love ! I cruel !" retorted Frank in indignant amazement, "when you know that this is all your work, Madam."

"If you leave her now, she will certainly die," said Evelina's mother, and, so alarming was the change that had come over the suffering fair one, since the dreadful intelligence of his approaching departure had reached her, that Mrs. Hickson's words seemed only too likely to come true. But what was to be done ? Mr. Hickson, when appealed to, could offer no suggestion. He was, himself, in a very small way, something in the City ; that is, he rented a second floor front in Pudding Lane, wherein were to be found a lopsided desk and a rickety table, some muddy ink and a rusty pen, a twisted poker and last year's almanac.

Mr. Hickson had no situation in his gift, for he kept no clerk. When he wanted to go out, he went, wafering a paper on his door, with a vague promise of returning, which he kept or not as it suited his convenience.

What—oh ! what was to be done ? How—oh ! how was this wretchedness to terminate ? Frank Pickering could see no way of escape from his engagement unless his mother paid the forfeit of three hundred pounds, and the profits of the fancy repository would scarcely justify this sacrifice.

One thing was very certain, Evelina could not accompany her Frank to Jamaica. Separation then was inevitable, and death to one, at least, must follow.

And now the dread day was rapidly approaching. Evelina had a series of relapses. Poor Mrs. Pickering's tears were never dry. Poor Frank was as thin and pale as a ghost. In fact things were reaching a climax, when Jimmy Jarman came to a determination.



CHAPTER IV.

Twas, withal, so weary a life at the busy warehouse down this crooked City lane, that, many times, James Jarman was tempted to wish when he had run away he had run a little further.

The week was so very long and Sunday so short, and the prospect of Monday morning so hopeless and dispiriting, no wonder James's heart grew no lighter and his cheeks no rosier.

Not that a Sunday was, strictly speaking, a day of rest in Mrs. Whitaker's little household since the new shepherd, Mr. Wapshot, had begun his good work of awakening. It was the reverend gentleman's custom, not unfrequently, to drop in, of an evening, after chapel, and explain such knotty points in his discourses, as had appeared obscure to the lady of the house. Anent these explanatory statements, Sam Whitaker—an unreliable vessel, who preferred his pipe to polemics'—had been heard in confidence to say he did not know which was worst, the knotty points or the unpicking.

As has been already stated, Stonywold Court was, at one time, in its way, a small theatrical colony, in which several workmen attached to the Great Sahara resided, and which was also enlivened by the presence of certain rising members of the profession. The good works of the Reverend Wapshot found more favour among the former than the latter, the minds of the generality of persons employed in the mechanical work of theatres being of a practical and plodding, rather than an imaginative nature; as, for in-

stance, it was Sam Whitaker's honest boast that he had never yet seen a play right through, and never wanted to, although he spent two-thirds of every night of his life upon a stage.

"You see, it's a sort of thing I don't at all care for—not the words and that," he would explain. "There's some as do, I don't deny, and I've no fault to find with 'em. It's not my taste, that's all. I've got my work cut out for me, and I've got to see it done at the right time. When I aint wanted behind, I drop into the Hyæny or the Sairy Arms, opposote the stage door, and I wait till the time comes on again. I leave the speechifying and the hollering and hullabalooing to them whose trade it is. I've nothing to say agen 'em. They're some of 'em very respectable—as respectable as you and me."

Thus Sam Whitaker was more favourably inclined towards Mr. Wapshot than was Mrs. Pounder, Mr. Jinks, Miss Jenkinson, or Mr. Montmorency, members of the Sahara company, residing in Stonywold Court. But when one day Mr. Wapshot suggested that Sam should give up working in the theatre, and find employment elsewhere, he was surprised and indignant.

"Where's the harm in it?" he asked. Mr. Wapshot explained where the harm was ; and for his arguments on this head, the reader is referred to a series of able articles in the *Thirsty Soul*, a dissenting temperance organ, very popular at the period of this history.

"I am not as bad as the play actors, surely," Sam reasoned ; but Mr. Wapshot would have it that all were bad alike, who earned their living within a playhouse's walls.

"At any rate, let me entreat of you, my dear friend, not to sully the purity of that poor boy's life with such a tainted atmosphere."

It was William to whom he alluded, who had had about a week's day work, at the time, in the theatre ; a grand new pantomime being then in hasty preparation, and extra hands required.

"The boy has got his living to earn," said Sam, with a self-sacrificing air. "If you could find him anything else as good, I've no objection." Indeed, why should he have had? He knew the job was only a short one, and there was nothing certain for the future.

"Let him earn his living in another way—where you like—anywhere; but let him not breathe the same air with those painted women."

Sam Whitaker, also, had his ideas about the painted women. He smiled, sarcastically, as he sometimes passed a miniature brougham waiting in Little Pannikin Street. He and the other carpenters were just as uncivil as they dared be to the ladies of the establishment, who perseveringly laboured at their conciliation by sweet smiles and civil speeches, and by addressing them by their surnames with a respectful prefix; for stage carpenters are a mighty power in a theatre, and a trap may be opened too slowly or a flat closed in too suddenly, or a change of scenery painfully procrastinated, when a graceful attitude is struck.

At last, it was agreed that William, for the present, should be put with a cabinet-maker, a friend of Mr. Wapshot's, until Mr. Wapshot saw his way to do something better for him. From this time, then, William was taken under Mr. Wapshot's special guidance and patronage, and the very least the Whitakers could do, in return for his kindness, was to ask him in, pretty frequently, to dinner, tea, and supper.

Often, when that black sheep, James, crawled home dead beat from an unusually hard dose of unpaid "overtime," he would find Mr. Wapshot seated at the supper-table, over which, when the cloth was removed, he would expound, somewhat lengthily.

Occasionally, forgetting his manners, James would close his eyes and nod his head upon his breast, when Mrs. Whitaker, very properly, would rap him on the crown with a knife-handle, asking him how he dared thus to misconduct himself.

Little Ann, who was now, as the saying goes, growing to be a big girl (she never grew to be a very big one), sat upright and serious and, preternaturally, wide-awake, and, when she was compelled to yawn, effected the manœuvre with great artfulness, behind her little, mittened hand.

But William was ever brisk and lively, thoughtful, attentive, tremendously in earnest. It wanted little prophetic power to foretell that, some day, William Bradshaw would come to be a light among chapel-goers—that he would have something to say, himself, at the proper season, and would say it loudly, with great self-reliance. He was no genius.

He had little sense of the beautiful, was scarcely more imaginative than a turnip, but he believed in himself with a deep trustfulness. He was one of the sort who do not know when they are beaten—who cannot understand they have had the worst of it. He would make his way in the world, would William.

His sphere might be limited, but he would take a foremost place in that narrow circle, and the rest would look up to and respect him. Some of these things to come were, at this time, shadowed forth by surprising outbursts upon William's part, that took the rest of the little community's breath away.

Already, he had begun to show he had a strong will of his own, and would often take the family under his wing, and set them straight, and indicate the paths in which they should walk. He said grace when Mr. Wapshot was not present. He also instituted family prayers.

Sam Whitaker, coming in the first night when William was reading aloud from the Bible, was lost in amazement. William read on without heeding him, and the stage carpenter, taking a seat on the edge of the nearest vacant chair, nursed his cap on his knee, and coughed behind his hand. As William continued to read, he presently stole out again, his boots creaking amazingly, and took a stroll in the court until the chapter was concluded.

Mrs. Whitaker was a little doubtful with regard to these innovations. She was not sure Sam would like it. Probably Sam did not, but William's will was stronger than the rest, and he carried the day: thus family prayers became an institution. But whilst William led the way, the other two young people gave but small indications of future conduct.

Little Ann was too old, now, to romp in the streets. These were days of darning and hemming. She had her share of household duties allotted to her, and helped her mother in the shop. A phrase, "When you have a house of your own," was not unfrequently in Mrs. Whitaker's mouth.

To provide for this emergency, the secret of pudding-making, or as much as Mrs. Whitaker knew of it—the good soul's hand was heavy on the paste-board—was imparted to the young girl, and, with occasional contradictions, the household duties were explained to her.

Already was her life mapped out for her. If nothing unforeseen occurred to alter the course of events, she was to be married to make puddings and have babies. When the old people died, she would have the shop. There was always a living to be got at it, if kept within bounds, without any wild launchings forth and accumulations of back stock.

"Don't touch the new rubbish," Mrs. Whitaker said ; "there's half too many things already, and they're trouble enough, as it is."

Sometimes the impudent fellows who had called on her to beg that she would speculate in the early numbers of a struggling publication, would secretly paste up a flaring bill upon the side of her house ; one usually committing this outrage whilst the other tried to talk the old lady over inside ; and on discovering this trick, her indignation was great. She never afterwards, under any circumstances, had anything to say to the publication which they had attempted thus to foist upon her.

It was not only settled, in a general way, that Ann was to be married when she was "old enough," but it was an understood thing she was to marry William.

"He is a good boy," Mrs. Whitaker would say ; "he will grow up to be a good man. Try and be worthy of him."

The dark-eyed little girl would make no answer ; indeed, what answer could she make ? There is a singular indelicacy among women when upon these subjects. Men, as a rule, make sacred idols of the women they are about to marry, and their most intimate friends scarce ever venture upon a word with regard to them. Perhaps they think all the more.

Who could doubt that Ann loved her suckling shepherd ? How could she have helped it ? He was brave, handsome, good. Besides, as has been said—it was an understood thing she was to marry him ; and, of course, we take the love for granted.

At this period, then, she had become a dark-eyed, quiet little girl, not thoroughly understood ; herself, all unconscious of the stormy passages to come.

There was one more person whose nature was an incomprehensible puzzle to those among whom he lived : who was, perhaps, a puzzle to himself, sitting alone, brooding,

silent. A dull, unappreciative hobble-de-hoy, an ever-present contrast to the bright, self-reliant cousin who had had a way to make in the world, and meant to make it.

Sometimes Mrs. Whitaker was moved to pity at the sight of this hopelessly dull and dreamy nature. "He'll never do any good for himself, poor fellow!" she said; "and I thank Goodness that he has found some one to see something in him."

It was a consolation to think that, so far, the black sheep of the family was provided for. Sam felt very thankful; not that he grudged the boy his keep, but his presence in the house had been the cause of some connubial bickerings. Was it likely that the good lady could ever entirely forget and forgive that creature who had disgraced Mr. Whitaker's name?

It would be a great blessing if this branch of the family were respectfully disposed of; and William, too, was of this way of thinking; for though he was yet a boy, he had his own shrewd, worldly notions, and saw that if he were to get on and make a name for himself, a connexion of that sort might be a great drawback to his future progress.

Presently, there was another cause for wishing James Jarman well disposed of. The Whitakers seemed likely to rise in the world. Sam Whitaker had saved a little money, and was in search of a good investment. Somebody suggested railway shares. This was the Hudsonian age, and everybody was dabbling in this sort of speculation. Sam Whitaker dabbled, also, very blindly, and made, in consequence, a very good thing of it.

Knowing ones said to Sam, do so and so; but Sam hesitated, and saved his money. Downy cards suggested such and such a venture; but Sam was slow, and allowed the golden opportunities, that were to have been, to slip by him, and his money to lie where he had first placed it. It seemed more than probable that by sheer stupidity and pigheadedness, Sam Whitaker was going to make a fortune.

He had already quadrupled his little capital. When Mr. Wapshot next urged him to quit the wicked playhouse people, he said, with a quiet smile, "Some of these fine days I may—perhaps, sooner than you think for."

If there had been a true prophet to be found down Stonywold Court way, he would have said, — Those Whitaker people are upon the eve of bettering their con-

dition. They will seek a brighter and genteeler sphere of existence, beyond the ken of Saint Starver's.

That good and handsome young fellow will have a chance in life he never dreamed of. And that strange, sickly-looking thing—what a pity that a rising family should have such a clog tied to their legs!

He cannot rise with them, that is certain.





CHAPTER V

GNE side of the premises occupied by Hankershanks's business bulged out riverwards, and was propped up by worm-eaten piles, so that a fanciful person might have said it stood with its feet in water, only it was seldom the tide was high enough to bring the water underneath. Generally there was, instead, much black mud and a great profusion of oyster shells. The house had been, report said, some time or other, somebody's palace; but if this were the case, it had been so knocked about, in these latter days, and so many ugly alterations made in it, there was nothing palatial remaining.

The room which Mr. Hankershanks occupied was, properly speaking, only a third of a room, and, as the only fireplace was in it, the other two-thirds, used as offices for the book-keeper and four clerks, were not as comfortable as they might have been in cold weather. As some of the window-sashes had been taken out, and from others panes of glass removed, the wind from the river blew in at all times, and, in winter, most parts of the house were intolerably cold.

It was a favourite theory of Hankershanks, that no one could feel cold unless he were skulking; and he was wont to say he had himself no time to feel cold, having too much else to think of.

"He'll be a good deal too warm when he reaches his journey's end," one of the clerks had been heard to say, as he sat shivering at his desk; "and if we're there together, I hope they'll make me stoker."

This clerk's name was Starkey. He was, perhaps, of a more chilly nature than his fellows; for he had been to

Jamaica, to the unhealthy settlement where Hankershanks's branch establishment was situated, and had returned invalided. There was, indeed, a strange interest attached to this same Starkey, as being the only one who had come back at all. He had not come back safe and sound, and hale and hearty, like the person in the song. He had left behind him over there—"in that accursed swamp"—the greater part of his teeth, the best part of his eyesight, and, according to his own account, the whole of his liver. He had gone out, he was fond of saying, in the bloom of his youth, and he had returned a wreck.

"I've wasted my life, that's what I've done," he would observe, taking Josh Waddiman, the porter, into his confidence.

They often drank together at the bar of the beetle-browed little beershop, further up the lane, this clerk and porter. He was the same porter that had threatened Jimmy upon the night of the fire, and since then he had done his best to conciliate the boy, who never having been closely questioned with respect to the events of that memorable evening, had not told anything which reflected upon Josh Waddiman's trustworthiness.

Upon one or two occasions, when the porter and Starkey were in the beershop, and Jimmy passed by, the former had invited the lad to enter. Although he did not drink with them, he had gone in and chatted awhile, and he had, also, chatted with these two at other times ; so that, presently, he, somehow, came to feel himself, in a manner of speaking, a party, tacitly, to the ill-wishes against the tyrant Hankershanks, whose downfall Starkey and the porter devotedly prayed for.

It was doubtful why. If Hankershanks were done away with, the business would be done away with also. He was quite alone in the world, it was said, without a relation living. Starkey would exclaim indignantly,

"The brute has money enough, in all conscience. Why doesn't he give over his money grubbing? Why doesn't he spend what he has got, and enjoy himself?"

But, although he had the means, this poor lonely creature would have found it rather more difficult than they supposed, to find any pleasure away from the dusty old ledgers in his counting-house. Not that he found much pleasure in their company, either.

His had been a weary life, full of disappointments and blighted hopes. Those he had loved, had cheated him most cruelly. The hands he had kissed lovingly, had struck him the foulest blows. A cold, hard man, he had been thought, when his coldness was but timidity and awkwardness. Now he had grown cold, and harsh, and callous, in reality.

"I'll have a day's work for a day's wage," he said. "I'll have no skulking here. I'll have my money's worth, do you hear? and if I can't get it out of you, I'll get it out of another. Mind that."

This was favourite talk of his ; but there was no necessity for such slave-driving measures. There was not, after all, so much to do in Hankershanks's business, that there needed this constant wear and tear, and worry.

As has already been stated, for the sake of seeming to be doing, it was the habit of the badgered hirelings to make work, to bustle unnecessarily, and affect an intensity of application, and preoccupation of an exaggerated character, whilst Hankershanks had his eye on them, and to relax, suddenly, when it was removed, and skulk upon all possible occasions.

It was not to be wondered at, then, if the generality of Hankershanks's clerks and warehousemen were of an inferior quality, and that, in spite of their pretended activity, he rarely got one fair day's work out of any three of them.

Notable among Hankershanks's bad bargains was Frank Pickering ; that is to say, since his love affairs had gone so wrong with him, for, previously, he had been among the most energetic ; and it was his present listless and despondent manner, that excited Hankershanks's wrath.

Others whom he employed wasted much more time, but, yet, managed to avoid his censure. There was, indeed, a sort of free-masonry existing between the clerks and warehouse people, and a code of signals by which the tyrant's approach was made known, while he was yet afar off. Up aloft little cherubs sat perched watching over the destinies of the idly-disposed, and passed the word when a certain round-shouldered slouching figure became visible in a distant bend of the crooked lane. Then disappeared, as though by magic, the surreptitious pewter pot ; the clandestine pipe was hastily extinguished, and cranes clanked, and chains rattled, and the owners of hoarse voices shouted to distant mates,

unseen, to "come on now," and to "look handy," and to "look alive," and not to "keep willing folks a week a-waiting."

The tyrant, ever on the look-out for skulkers, and laying artful traps to catch them, was, nevertheless, imposed upon at every turn.

There was, indeed, no living soul in his employ, or with whom he came in contact in the world beyond, who did not dislike him. There was, to tell the truth, nothing in his appearance, his manner, his acts, to recommend him. He was ugly and dirty, his clothes were worn and ragged. Very often, strangers, calling upon business, mistook him for a servant, and addressed him slightly.

These accidents, however, pleased him much, for they afforded him an opportunity for retort, perhaps for triumph.

In Bloomsbury Square he had a large house, entirely unfurnished, with the exception of an attic in which he lived, choosing the upper part of the house, he said, for the sake of the fresh air. Here he kept no servant, and had his room cleaned out only at rare intervals.

He might have let the house at a high rental, had he thought fit to do so; and it was because some one, with whom he had quarrelled, had moved heaven and earth to get hold of it, that he held tight to it himself; and, being left to the mercy of the elements, its dilapidated exterior soon became an eyesore to its prim neighbours, and a source of wondering speculation to passers-by.

Snarling and snapping at all the world, this forlorn, forsaken, loveless old man shut himself up when his day's work was over, and passed his nights no one cared to know how. There would come a morning, probably, when the milkman's ring would be unheeded; and then, when the authorities should resolve to break the door open, something shrunken and ape-like would, perhaps, be found, curled up upon the bed up stairs; and there would be one old man less in the world, which would revolve upon its axis neither faster nor slower on that account.



CHAPTER VI.

MENTION has been made, upon more than one occasion, of Frank Pickering's official shortcomings, and of his young friend Jemmy Jarman's devotion.

The latter, secretly, did a large portion of the former's work, without Hankershanks ever suspecting the deception. Since the course of Frank's true love had run so unsmoothly, Frank's arithmetic had been anything but accurate, and by no amount of ingenuity could his accounts be made to balance. With a perversity, which was quite his own, Hankershanks just at this time, too, gave Frank extra doses of book-keeping; and, as though he were bent on bringing his mental energies to an untimely collapse, gave him, in addition to his other duties, the temporary care of the petty cash.

With this press of work upon him, Frank Pickering broke down, lamentably, and would inevitably have come to the most grievous of grief had not his devoted James stopped late of a night to get the arrears up. Frank did not stop with him because, as James said, he was not, in his present state of mind, of much assistance. James was not great at figures himself—you may remember his downfall in the old school days—but he worked with a will, and got through his task, somehow, with some blundering.

This state of things had existed for about a fortnight, when one day there was an extra crush of business, upon the strength of which the tyrant Hankershanks was more than usually tyrannical, and Frank more than usually helpless. Hankershanks stormed and blustered. Frank, with

an overwhelming sense of injury, clenched his fists and glowered darkly. Hankershanks, all unconscious of these signs of a white-heat of anger, blustered more than ever, and heaped insult upon injury. There were moments when the bully's life was seriously imperilled by the close vicinity of a heavy ruler, on which the goaded Pickering's fingers closed convulsively.

"I shall expect this work cleared up before you leave, you will please to understand," Hankershanks said as he put on his hat to go.

Frank had an appointment that night with his Evelina, an appointment, as you can easily understand, of the most vital consequence. To look at things hopefully, the world would come to an end, at the very least, if this appointment were not kept, but how was he to keep it? An hour after Hankershanks had taken his departure, Frank and James were left alone. The former, with his head buried in his hands, was lost in bitter thought. The latter was pegging away at Pickering's arrears.

Presently Jimmy said,—

"Don't stop any longer; you'll be too late, won't you?"

"Of course I shall be too late. She will be waiting. You know what a little makes her ill, and most likely she will fret herself into a relapse. But never mind," here he clenched his fist and frowned darkly, "I'll settle accounts with him, some day, never fear."

"Five and two are seven—nine are sixteen, and four are twenty. Nought, and carry two."

James was totaling up an addition. Presently he left off to address his friend.

"Do go and keep your appointment, Frank. I am sure you need not mind about me. I shall be all right."

"If you stop here to do the work by yourself, it will take you all night."

"Not quite as bad as that—an hour or two, that is all."

"But you want to get home yourself."

"No, I'm in no hurry."

"It's not so very jolly at home, at your place, is it?"

"Not so very—"

"Well, if you are quite sure it will not put you out—"

"Quite sure."

"At some other time, you know, if I can help you any way—"

And while thus saying he would not, he did. He had brushed his hat with a reluctant air five minutes ago. Three minutes since, with an air of great self-sacrifice, he had buttoned up his overcoat. Now, with the air of a man who, in the cause of friendship, was putting himself out very considerably, he tied on his comforter, and moved towards the door.

"It's really too bad of Evelina," he said in an injured tone, "she is so inconsiderate: the times she appoints are so inconvenient," and he went away with this, leaving James to his arithmetic.

As soon as he was gone, Jimmy Jarman took a sort of general survey of the work that had to be done, and arranged it carefully. There was a good deal more than he had calculated on, for this had been one of Frank's worst days, and he had not only left undone the work to which Hankershanks had alluded, but other work artfully concealed at the bottom of baskets, or under paper weights, all now brought to light, and proving to be of a pressing nature.

"I sha'n't get home till after twelve," thought Jimmy. "I hope William won't be sitting up."

As he felt quite certain that he had at least four hours' work before him, and as he had not had his tea—a fact which Frank Pickering had forgotten in the hurry of departure—he turned out the contents of his pockets, found a matter of sixpence halfpenny, and made his calculations.

"Hallo, Sir! You're late, aint you?"

Josh Waddiman had put his head in at the door, and nodded to him as he spoke. Jimmy explained that he would be there for several hours yet, and broached the subject of refreshment, which he proposed going out in search of. Upon this suggestion Josh Waddiman proposed an amendment. Refreshments might be purchased upon more reasonable terms in the proper market than at a coffee shop—the proper market and its usages being Josh Waddiman's private and peculiar secret. Supposing, then, Josh Waddiman were to go in search of the provisions, and were to make tea in a pot of his own: it could then be drunk out of mugs which from a private store he would produce for the occasion?

It is needless to say that such an offer could not be refused, and the arrangement could hardly be considered disadvantageous, from Josh Waddiman's point of view,

when it is borne in mind that, thereby, the two were regaled at the price that would have been paid for one, the other way, and that Jimmy paid for both.

The porter suggested that they should take their meal in Mr. Hankershanks's room, where they could light a fire.

"And hadn't you better bring your work in there with you?" he said. "It's perishing cold out here to-night."

It was indeed a biting winter's night, the coldest that year, and there was only one fireplace in the three rooms. Jimmy collected his papers, and glanced round to see that he had left nothing behind. He also tried the door of an iron safe before quitting the room; it was the safe in which Frank Pickering kept his petty cash; and Jimmy's reason for looking at it now was that he fancied his friend might have forgotten to take away the key, as he left in a hurry. But all seemed secure, and he followed Waddiman into the other office. Here, already, the porter had made a blazing fire, and the kettle was just upon the boil.

James, still sticking to his work, took his tea in small instalments, with a hasty snatch at the bread and butter, when he could find time. Josh Waddiman, on the other hand, worked steadily, with but one object in view, that of clearing the table. It must not be wondered at, then, if the younger of the two tea-takers came off somewhat the worst in this joint-stock meal, and found that when the platter was clean he had still a craving doomed to remain unappeased.

Stretching forth his hand in search of another slice of bread and butter, but without raising his eyes from his work, Jimmy encountered only empty air, until, as he still kept on groping, Josh Waddiman, with a merry humour, thrust the hot teapot forward within his grasp, and laughed, uproariously, when he burnt himself.

"I thought there was some more," said Jimmy, blowing his fingers, and colouring.

"Oh, no," Josh Waddiman responded, smiling pleasantly, "not at all. You've been eating hearty, Mr. Jarman, Sir. You was occupied, most likely, and didn't notice how you put it away. There's lots more hot water, though the tea-leaves aint got as much flavour in 'em as I like to see; and I've a somethink here you're welcome to a taste of if you choose. I find it brings the flavour out."

"The somethink" was the contents of a flat, pint bottle

of which Josh Waddiman took a liberal supply himself, but Jimmy refused, and went on with his work.

The porter having put away the tea-things, with the exception of the mugs out of which they had been drinking, took his seat by the fireside, and lighting a pipe, puffed the smoke up the chimney. For some time, then, the only sounds breaking the silence were the scratching of Jimmy's pen, and the occasional cracking of the burning coal. Josh Waddiman finished his pipe, and took a nap, woke up and lit a fresh pipe; finished it, and had another nap. Meanwhile Jimmy's pen still kept on scratching.

"Most done your work, Sir?" asked Waddiman. "It's near nine, I should think. I've half a mind to step out and see."

This idea about the time had only occurred to him after looking inside the flat pint bottle, now empty; and Jimmy observing the movement, hastened to offer a remark.

"I sha'n't be very long now," he said. "If you are going out, you will come back before I go away?"

"I shouldn't be long, of course, Mr. Jarman," replied the other in an injured tone. "You don't suppose I'd leave the place to take care of itself, when I was left in charge?"

Jimmy could not help smiling, for he had a vivid recollection of such a circumstance occurring upon a certain memorable occasion. Josh Waddiman might have noticed the smile, but, if he did, he indignantly ignored it and went on.

"I shouldn't leave the premises without you was a-stopping here—do you understand that, Mr. Jarman? I suppose I aint wrong in a leaving you in charge—I'm sure I hope not; and I hope I sha'n't come to grief along of trusting you."

Jimmy looked up with a flushed face, and would have returned an angry reply, but he saw from a sort of wild fixedness about the old man's eye, that the contents of the flat bottle had something to do with the line of argument he had taken up, and he refrained from making any rejoinder. Josh Waddiman took this silence as an insult, and glared at him savagely, but presently he forgot his anger.

"The premises is left to my care," he went on, "and has been so for some time, Sir, if I'm not mistaken. There's no particular harm come to the premises while I've had charge of them."

"Except their having been burnt to the ground," Jimmy could not refrain from remarking.

Josh Waddiman took the correction in good part.

"Except when they was burnt down," he continued, very seriously. "But perhaps the governor didn't lose much over that job, neither, seeing he was insured a good third over the stock's value, we being half empty at the time, Sir, as perhaps you may have heard. I'll step round the corner, Mr. Jarman, with your leave, and I'll place the premises under your care while I'm gone. I hope I sha'n't do wrong in doing so."

With this virtuous aspiration the old man took his departure, taking the flat bottle with him, which, in an accidental sort of way, he had dropped into his pocket while he talked. Jimmy listened to his retreating steps as he blundered along the passage to the outer door, and then heard him fumbling with the bolts. He also heard the door open, but did not hear it close again.

"He's left it on the jar," thought Jimmy; "he doesn't mean to stop long then, I suppose."

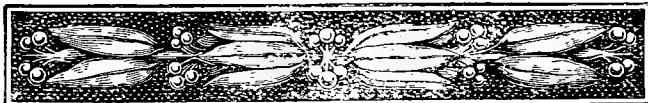
Almost as he spoke the wind rose and angrily rattled at the window-frame, blowing a window open up stairs with a loud crash.

"The place isn't very safe in his keeping if there were much money left here of a night."

This idea occurred to him as he resumed his work, and also another idea, which was that it was rather lonely to be left by oneself in that great rambling house, up the quiet City lane.

"I shall be glad when he comes back again," said Jimmy half aloud.





CHAPTER VII.

BUT it took a long while, upon Josh Waddiman's system, to ascertain the hour, although the public-house clock he had gone to look at was not a hundred yards away, up the lane. Jimmy worked away, finished his work, and sat waiting for the old man's return.

Drawing his chair up to the fire when he had packed up his papers, Jimmy presently felt that the heat was sending him off into a dose, and only aroused himself, after a momentary oblivion, upon the very eve of butting at the iron bars.

"I wonder how long he has been gone," the lad asked himself. "I wish he would come back."

It was surprising how lonely the house seemed, and how cold; and he shivered and drew nearer to the fire, gradually nodding off to sleep again, in spite of his efforts to be lively.

Opening his eyes, however, after another momentary lapse, he began to wonder whether all this time the street-door had been standing open, and to ask himself whether or not he ought, under the circumstances, to go down and shut it.

But while he was debating, he heard a footstep in the passage without. Thank Goodness! the old man had returned at last.

The lad, who had risen from his chair at the first sound and stood with his eyes fixed on the door, began to wonder why Waddiman was so long in making his appearance. The

thought struck him, then, did the old man mean to play him some sort of trick? The footstep had passed the door, and there was a movement in the next room. What did it mean?

In a tremble of apprehension—for he felt as though something strange and terrible were about to take place—he stepped, swiftly, towards the partition-door, and jerked it open. There was a light in the room, and a figure at the safe, with its back turned towards him.

“Waddiman!”

The figure turned quickly and extinguished the light; but the light from the other room revealed to him the intruder’s face. It was not the porter, as he had expected; but his first sensation was one of relief, at finding that it was a face he knew—the face of Starkey. Next moment, however, he saw a key shining in the other’s hand, and all the truth flashed upon him.

He had to do with a thief.

An instant later, without reflecting upon possible consequences, he had a tight hold of Starkey, and, by a sudden snatch, had possessed himself of the key. Starkey, though much his superior in size and strength, was, for the time, powerless with terror and astonishment, and he shook as though the hand of a policeman were upon his shoulder.

“Don’t ruin me, Jarman,” he stammered out when, at last, he recovered the use of his tongue: “I never did you any harm. How many are here besides you? You won’t peach on me, will you?”

“You would have ruined my friend Pickering if you had taken the money,” James retorted: “or me, perhaps, for the place was left in my charge. Where’s Waddiman all this while? Is he in league with you?”

“No, no, Jarman. No one knows of this but you and I. Nobody need know, need they? The old man’s at the public-house; someone is standing him some drink. He’s good for ever so long yet.”

Many years afterwards, when he looked back at the events of this night—when he and Starkey had met again, one a rich man, the other a homeless outcast—he recollect ed the abject, craven aspect of the detected thief; his whining tones, his appealing looks, his cowardly helplessness.

It was evident he had screwed up all the courage he

possessed to make the burglarious attempt. He had made it, and now, in the moment of detection, he was utterly prostrated. Without a notion of defending himself, he stood there, quite passive in his youthful captor's hands.

Afterwards, he confessed that he had been an hour and more hanging about the open door, undecided whether or not he should make the venture.

He continued his pitiful appeal. "You won't let this go further, Jarman, will you? You don't know how I was tempted to it. You don't know what an awful strait I am in for money. I didn't mean to keep it altogether—I swear I didn't. I would have paid it back before it was found out—before the end of the week, when Pickering balances his book. You know he doesn't balance every day. Leave go of my coat. You'll let me go, Jarman, won't you, as there's been no harm done?"

"How do I know there hasn't?" asked Jimmy, doubtfully. "Had you opened the safe?"

"No, no," the other replied, with great eagerness. "Look for yourself. Do you think I would try to deceive you in that way, Jarman? Trust your own eyes, if you won't trust me."

The safe was certainly locked, and then Jimmy reflected he could hardly have had time to take anything out, and lock it up again. He began to debate in his own mind what he should do. Instead of acting as anyone else would, in all probability, have done—that is, instead of calling for assistance and, if possible, giving the self-accused thief into custody, or at any rate, keeping him till the porter returned, and telling him all that had occurred—James Jarman began to reason with himself, and, finally, decided to settle the affair according to his own idea of justice.

We may see more of this fatal reasoning, and its consequences, in the course of our story.

While he was undecided, however, there reached him, from the passage without, the sound of the porter's banging-to the street-door.



CHAPTER VIII.

AS the footsteps approached, Starkey's terror momentarily increased, and his teeth fairly chattered in his head.

"You—you won't tell him? You—you won't ruin me?"

"What am I to do? There is no time for you to get away.—The door is closed."

"Let me stop here, and hide?"

"No, not in this room. Where else can you go?"

"I can get down stairs into the cellar, without him hearing me."

"Go!"

Scarcely was the word spoken, when Josh Waddiman opened the door of Hankershanks's room, Jimmy went hastily forward to meet him, and thus covered Starkey's retreat. Noiselessly, then, the thief stole down stairs, his presence in the house wholly unsuspected by the porter.

Indeed, Josh Waddiman's state was somewhat favourable to Starkey's evasion. He had been looking at the clock so long, it had got into his head. He had a rolling motion, while he stood steadying himself by the door-post, as though his body had been a pendulum. There was, at intervals, a sort of catch in his throat, not much unlike the tick of a wheezy old cuckoo.

"Done your work yet, Mr. Jarman?"

Jimmy answered in some confusion that he had nearly done, and asked if Josh wanted to go to bed.

"It's perhaps the warmest place one could be in, such a

night as this. I've half a mind to make up my bed on the box here, by the side of the fire."

Jimmy heard this news uneasily. How was Starkey to make his escape, without being detected? Perhaps, though, he had done it already? Was that a stealthy footfall in the passage? The old man's yawning continued,—

"I'll make up my bed when I've let you out. You won't be very long, I dare say!"

"Not so long; but you need not keep awake for me. I'll be sure to pull the door to."

"I'd rather see myself it's all right, Sir. I've got the premises to take care of, you know. I've got—Hollo, I've got the key!"

It was the door-key he alluded to, which as he spoke he drew forth from his pocket, and contemplated, with tipsy gravity. Presently, the reason for its presence in that locality dawned upon him, and he smiled, good-humouredly.

"I recollect, now," he said. "As I'd been detained a little longer nor I thought I should ha' been—I fancied you might ha' gone, and so I locked up and brought away the key."

It must be confessed that this speech might not have been, to an unprejudiced third person, altogether confirmatory of Josh Waddiman's trustworthiness. Jimmy, however, made no remark, but pretended to go on with his work. The old man, meanwhile, settling himself comfortably in his chair, began to nod again.

"He'll fall fast off to sleep presently," the young clerk thought, "and then I may be able to get hold of the key."

To pass the time, however, he had better find some employment. Frank Pickering's work was all done, but he had some work of his own, which he had intended to begin upon next morning. Among this was an account which Hankershanks had given him before he went away, saying he was to take it up in the regular course. On referring to it now, Jimmy concluded that his employer must have only carelessly read the particulars, as the account ought evidently to have been done at once.

He set to work at it, then, glad of finding something to employ his time, and looked up every now and then to see how Waddiman was going on. But Waddiman's slumbers were light and broken. He nodded and lurched, and started back and snorted, and every five minutes, he was sitting up again as wide awake as ever.

In one of these periods of wakefulness, the old man threw on some more coal and stirred the fire up. "I don't think I shall move away from this to-night," he said, "and it's too cold to trouble to go up stairs for the bed-clothes. Whew! it's cold enough to freeze the marrow in one's bones."

It was, indeed, a bitter night, and boisterous, too; and the crazy old woodwork of the overhanging house side strained and creaked like the timbers of a tempest-tossed ship. Where could that unhappy Starkey be hiding? He must, by this time, be half-perished with cold. Jimmy began to feel very uneasy. What would the Whitakers think of his prolonged absence? It was too late to go home. A neighbouring church clock had just struck one.

To pass the time, Jimmy went on with his work. He had, probably, never laboured with such energy in the cause of Hankershanks, certainly, never with such a result. Grind-ing away, if for nothing else, to keep himself awake, he very soon had made head against the formidable pile of papers he had first started upon, and it seemed not unlikely that, if he worked much longer, there would be no work left to do.

Yet must he, perforce, remain where he was. The old man had dropped off to sleep at last; but he was lying on the side where the pocket was which contained the key.

Twice, losing all patience, Jimmy had made an attempt to possess himself of the coveted object, but without success. The second time, when his hand was on the key, an incautious movement aroused the sleeping man, who, starting up, glared at him in stupid terror.

"What are you doing? what do you want?"

"To poke the fire."

"Haven't you most done your work? I oughtn't to let the clerks stay here all night. I don't say there aint no exact order agin it, for I suppose the gov'nor thought you weren't likely to want to do two days' work for one days' wages. But it's not taking care of the premises to let such things go on. You must make haste."

"Yes, yes: I sha'n't be long now."

When three o'clock struck, the old man was fast asleep; but the door-key was more inaccessible than ever. The time began to hang very heavily upon James Jarman's hands; but how much heavier must the shivering wretch have found it, skulking in the cellars, dreading lest the slightest movement he made should lead to his detection!

Once Jimmy fancied he heard a sound as of some one breathing at the keyhole, and then a slight stumbling noise in the passage. The old porter, who was awake when the second sound was audible, turned his head to listen.

"That's the rats," he said; "they come into the cellars by swarms. When the tide is high, they're driven upwards. I've seen one in this office."

The weary hours dragged on, the old man passing the time in fitful slumber. The young clerk working desperately, resolved not to go to sleep, and so at length the first faint streaks of daylight stole between the great grim warehouses in the lane, and even penetrated the dingy office where James Jarman stooped over his desk.

It was time now for Josh Waddiman to begin his day's work and to open the outer door. He awoke of his own accord, and seemed in no small degree surprised to find he still had company.

"You've never been working all this time, surely?"

"I had more to do than I thought for."

"You must be mortal tired."

"I am tired."

"The Lord be thanked it's morning, anyways. That's the stiffest-backed beast of a chair I've ever had a nightmare in. There's too much wood in the seat of it to allow one ease, in any shape a human form can double up into."

"Thank God, it's morning."

The old man made up the fire afresh, and opened the window.

"It has been a black frost all night," he said, shivering, "and it's cold enough now to ice one's vitals. I shall be no good till I've taken a thimbleful of something short."

"If you are going to get your breakfast," said Jimmy Jarman, "I wish you would let me breakfast with you, and I will bring the money to pay for my share to-morrow. It's not worth while going home now."

The old man agreed to this, and presently departed to make the necessary purchases. Here was the moment he had waited for so long, arrived at last. As soon as Josh had disappeared round a twist of the lane, Jimmy ran to the top of the cellar, and called aloud to Starkey.

The other, looking more dead than alive, crawled forth in answer to his name. His face was pinched and blue with cold, and he trembled so violently, that he appeared to be scarcely able to walk.

Jimmy made some conciliatory remark, but he passed by without heeding it, and crouching down before the office fire, thrust out his hands within an inch of the flames.

"I'm glad you managed it at last," he said; "it's only just time. An hour more and I must have given in. This night will be my death."

"It was not my fault," replied the younger clerk, angrily. "I have been waiting here all night, only to get a chance of letting you out. Go now, before he returns; it will be best for him not to see you here so early."

"It doesn't much matter; I've done no harm—thanks to you, I shall do no harm to anyone very long. I'm booked, I am."

Without one word of thanks, without one grateful expression, he went away, and the lad turned, wearily, to his papers, and began to pack them up. Pausing in this occupation, he asked himself whether he had done the man who had just left him an injury or a service. Was it to be always thus?—that those for whom he made sacrifices—those he ran risks to serve, should turn upon him? Would his motives be ever misconstrued, would he never be understood?





CHAPTER IX.

WITH a very dark and gloomy face, he was gazing vacantly into the fire, when he heard a footstep in the passage. It was not the porter's shuffling step: it was not Starkey's. He half turned his head, wondering, and saw Hankershanks in the doorway.

It wanted at least two hours of the usual time of his employer's arrival, and James, with his guilty knowledge of the past night, started and trembled at sight of him, and made as though he would have left the room. But Hankershanks stopped him.

"I want to look at the papers I gave you the last thing yesterday evening," he said. "I'm afraid there's one I made a mistake about."

Jimmy held forth the papers upon which he had been at work. His heart palpitated violently, and he dare not trust himself to speak. The other, however, quite unconscious of his emotion, busied himself with the various letters and documents before him, and scanned their contents rapidly.

"Hallo!" he exclaimed, "how's this? It's done then, is it? Who's done it? Oh, I see. You found out I'd made an error, and came early to make up the account. That's very good! That's very sharp of you. You've saved me a lot of money. It's very sharp indeed. Here's a five-pound note for your trouble."

He had said this, thrust the money into Jimmy's hand, and gone away into another office, rapidly checking the boy's arithmetic as he went, and Jimmy was left there, standing speechless, the bank-note between his fingers.

What should he do? What could he do? He could not tell Hankershanks that his reason for working after office-hours was to get down Frank Pickering's arrears. As little could he explain his prolonged stay throughout the night. No, it would be best to allow his employer to suppose that things were as he had said. But the five-pound note seemed to blister his hand; somehow at the moment, he felt that he was ever so much more culpable than Starkey.

He carried the other papers to his own desk, and, when feeling for his purse in which to place the note, felt the key of the safe, that he had wrested from his fellow-clerk's grasp. He put this away now, in his desk, and being anxious to see Josh Waddiman and make some fresh arrangements with respect to breakfast (those previously made being impracticable owing to Hankershanks's return), he went out into the crooked lane, and looked about.

It occurred to him, after gazing fruitlessly around for some five minutes or so, that the old porter might have looked in at his favourite public-house, and thither he bent his steps. Josh was not there, but he found Starkey seated on a bench behind the door on which, by his side, stood a pewter quartern measure empty. His hat was pushed far back upon his head, and his hair hung down over his eyes. He sat with his shoulders up, and his hands thrust deeply into his trousers pockets, one leg in the air with his foot against the wall, and between his teeth he held an empty pipe, at which he was contentedly puffing.

Jimmy came to a stand-still before this wretched figure, and contemplated it half wondering, half ashamed. An elderly woman serving behind the bar, seemed far from well-disposed towards Mr. Starkey's lounging position at so early an hour, and presently, finding that verbal hints were thrown away upon him, made believe to have some sweeping to do, and charged him with a broom.

Starkey, grumbling, sat upright, and his eyes rested on Jimmy's face.

“ Hallo, you, what do *you* want? ”

Jimmy making no reply, was going away again, when the other stopped him.

“ Look here; I want to have a word with you. Give me another half-quartern, Missus. This night's most killed me, Jarman. I shall never be worth a curse again. I ought to be at home in my bed, if I had a home or a bed. What's

it matter, though, whether it kills me or not? Who cares? I don't."

Jimmy looked at his companion with alarm, and seeing him raise the replenished measure to his lips, instinctively stretched forth his hand to stop him.

"Starkey, don't drink any more."

Starkey laughed, and holding Jimmy at arm's-length with his hand upon his shoulder, regarded him with an expression which was one-third ironical, and two-thirds gin.

"Don't you frighten yourself on my account, Mr. Jarman. It's not at all necessary, thank you! What I'm drinking won't hurt me very much. It'll warm me perhaps, that's all, for the cold of that infernal cellar's eating right into my bones. I'm taking it neat, you see, but it's just probable I'll take the water separately—afterwards. *Afterwards*. Do you understand?"

"No; what do you mean?"

"My time's up, that's all, and my game played out; at least, I don't care to stop for another act. I'll pull the curtain down myself, and cut the drama short. That's what I'll do——"

Jimmy was frightened.

"You don't know what you are saying. Come away from here—out into the lane. You have not had any breakfast."

"I don't want any. Leave go of me, will you? You can't help me more than you have. If I could have borrowed a matter of four or five pounds—three pounds even would have been enough—if I could have had them for forty-eight hours.—And who was to have been a bit the wiser?"

"How do you mean? it might have been discovered the first thing in the morning. The money might have been missed directly, and my friend Frank Pickering brought into trouble on your account."

"It isn't likely. You know he doesn't balance every day."

"Perhaps not. At any rate—But what do you mean? You don't suppose I could see you breaking into the safe, and not interfere," James retorted angrily. "I should have been as bad as you. Even as it is, I ought——"

"Oh yes, I know," cried the other in a loud voice; "you ought to do your duty. Why don't you? Why don't you give me up? It might as well end that way as any other, for what I can see."

Perhaps Starkey was better acquainted with the nature of the person he was addressing than the person was himself, for Jimmy, fearful lest his companion should say anything of a compromising nature, hastily silenced him, and dragged him away.

"Don't—don't talk so loud," he said, breathlessly. "Tell me, are you in some great difficulty, and will three pounds really get you out of it?"

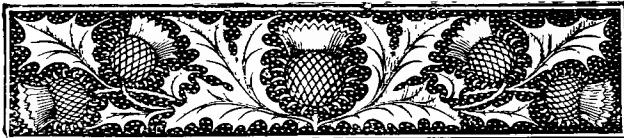
"I am in the greatest possible want of that sum, and if you could manage so that I borrowed it from the safe——"

"No, no! How dare you? How can you talk like that?" He was silent for a moment, too angry to speak, but mastering his emotion with a great effort, continued, "I was going to say that if three pounds would be of such great service, I would lend them to you. See, here is a five-pound note. Can you get me change?"

Starkey took it in his hand, and stared at it amazed. At that moment the old porter became visible, turning the corner of a street about a dozen yards from where they stood. Anxious that Josh Waddiman should not see him lending the money—his motive for concealing the action he could not have explained to himself—James hastily motioned his companion to hide the note away, and said, "You can give me the change presently in the office."

With a nod of intelligence which, however, was not altogether intelligible to the person to whom it was addressed, Starkey re-entered the public-house, and Jimmy hurried forward to meet the old man.





CHAPTER X.

HT was a bitterly cold morning, almost as cold as it had been overnight, and Hankershanks's people were slow to arrive at their posts.

As we have seen, Hankershanks himself was earlier than usual ; his anger, therefore, was very naturally excited by the tardiness of his staff. When the hour of beginning work drew near, he lay in wait for them, watch in hand. He fell foul of the first comer two minutes and a half (Hankershanks's mean time) too late ; he bore down upon the second—five minutes late—with vulture swoop ; he utterly annihilated (figuratively speaking) the third, seven minutes behind ; the fourth slipped in unobserved while he was bullying the third, and affected preternatural zeal, with a dry pen ; the fifth, a warehouseman of irreproachable character, got warning on the spot, and then Frank Pickering arrived.

Things, since he left overnight, had gone badly with Frank Pickering. His Evelina and he had had some unpleasantness. There had been accusations and recriminations. At one period of the evening it was agreed that, all things considered, it would be as well if they never met again. Later on they had made it up, but they had had a trifling misunderstanding at the last moment, and Mrs. Hickson insisting that it was time, Mr. Pickering took his leave ; going away much aggrieved, and passing in consequence a wretched night.

He turned up next day at his place of business very weary and worn. The lane seemed more crooked and ill-paved than ever, as he came stumbling down it. There was the

same hateful old smoke-blackened building—the same hateful energy upon the part of the employed—the same bumping and thumping—banging and clanging. He would have given the world, he thought, at the moment he ascended the doorstep, with a heavy sigh—to be able to dream through the day in peace—to nurse his own wretched thoughts in comfort, and while away the miserable hours in a soft arm-chair by the fireside.

But such was not to be. Hankershanks was waiting for him upon the threshold of the office.

“What the devil do you mean, Sir, by coming here at this hour?”

Frank had no reply to make. He looked at his employer darkly, and hung his hat upon a peg. To himself he observed whilst so doing, “I don’t care how soon this life is at an end: I can’t bear it much longer.”

The brute Hankershanks, yet unsated by the feast of lamb’s blood he had had, came raging at the unhappy Pickering’s heels.

“What makes you come at all? It’s hardly worth while. But, let me tell you, my good Sir, this way of going on won’t answer with me. Understand that. You’ll have to brighten up, though, where you’re going to.”

Frank held his peace, and got out his papers. He was labouring under an overwhelming sense of injury, and vented his just indignation upon inanimate objects—the ruler, the penknife, and the pens.

Presently, Hankershanks having gone out, he was able to give his anger voice, and turned round to complain of his humble friend James.

“What a confusion you’ve left everything in!” he said. “This comes of asking you to help one.”

Perhaps Jimmy might have expostulated, but Hankershanks returned at the moment.

“What are you all doing now?” he roared out. “Why aren’t you at your work, Jones? Now, Smith, skulking again, as usual. I’ll send you about your business before you’re a week older. Here, Jarman,” he added in quite a different tone, “come up with me to the docks. You’re the only fellow in the place who’s worth his salt. Come with me, and we’ll take this account you made out, to the shipbroker’s.”

There were some wondering looks exchanged when

Hankershanks and the young clerk had taken their departure. Jones wanted to know what was in the wind. Smith would have felt obliged if any one could tell him what was coming next. Robinson's smile was full of meaning, though that meaning was unfathomable. Frank Pickering went on turning over his papers, looking very angry whilst thus employed.

Finding all his work already done, he was somewhat puzzled to discover some occupation for his time, and having taken it into his head to feel industriously inclined, he opened his safe and began to count over his petty cash.

He had not been thus engaged very long, before he began to exclaim loudly. One of the others asked what was the matter.

"I can't make the money right. Just reckon this up, Jones, will you? I've gone over it twice already, and cannot make it agree."

Jones went through the figures. "There's five pounds short, if that's all the cash you have in hand."

"That's all the cash I've got. Somebody must—"

The rest looked up. Somebody must what? was the question their eyes asked. Frank Pickering was examining the safe, and had found a deep scratch running across the surface of green paint, from the keyhole towards one side. Noting this circumstance, without knowing what importance to attach to it, but with a vague notion of something wrong, he went back to his desk and recounted the balance of cash in hand. Then, with a suspicion that some of his arithmetic might after all be a little faulty, he raised the lid of Jimmy's desk to get some account-book he knew was there, and found a key.

The key was of a peculiar make, and not easily to be mistaken; it was the key of the iron safe. But what key? There should have been but one.

Frank, holding it in his hand, looked back at the other key he had left in the lock, and then back again at this one, and then, he noticed something very singular. Upon the end of the barrel was sticking a little of the green paint that had been scratched off the door.



CHAPTER XI.

WHILE he was yet endeavouring to find an answer to this riddle, Starkey came slouching in at the door, and took his seat, sulkily, in the corner he usually occupied.

"Where's Jarman?" he asked.

"The model clerk, you mean," responded Jones, with fine irony. "The junior partner that is to be."

"Junior what? What's the joke? I don't see it."

Smith, taking up the story, then related how Hankershanks had spoken of Jimmy before them, and how such complimentary expressions, never before within the memory of mortal clerk, had been applied to one of them by Hankershanks the insatiable, exacting and abusive.

Frank Pickering here broke in with this astounding intelligence:—

"Somebody's been at my safe. I've been robbed of five pounds."

"Robbed! How? When?"

"Last night. Here's the key that was used."

"In Jarman's desk?"

"Yes."

Starkey, with a very white and unwholesome face, was listening to these remarks, holding on to the edge of the table with a tight grip, as though otherwise he feared he might lose his balance and fall to the ground. The rest crowded round Frank Pickering, who in a great state of excitement, and very red in the face, was making incoherent declarations regarding his own punctuality and exactitude,

the baseness of James Jarman's treachery, etc. etc., some of which he lived long enough to be much ashamed of.

Jones and Smith, too, rushing at hasty conclusions, had already tried and convicted the absentee, and sentenced him to an impossible term of penal servitude. Robinson, for the sake of argument, took an opposite view of the case.

"It's strange he should have another key, and you not know of it. I admit that, but then mightn't the gov'nor have given it to him?—they seem to be hand and glove."

"But the five pounds?"

"He authorised him, perhaps, to take it out of the safe."

"But why did he not say he had done so?"

"He forgot it, perhaps."

"Forgot it! How could he?"

"He hadn't time to tell you. The gov'nor took him out, you know."

Starkey took no part in the argument. He was still very white, and still clung to the sides of his desk, something like a drowning man clinging to a rock. Robinson appealed to him:—

"What do *you* say? Is it likely he has taken the money?"

"Let me look at the key."

Starkey spoke in a thick voice, and stretched forth an unsteady hand.

When the key was handed to him he turned it over and over. The others looking on noticed that he had been drinking, but this was not a very unusual occurrence with him. He was very often a little fresh during office hours; sometimes quite early in the morning, as upon this occasion.

"Does this key unlock the safe? You've never tried it, have you?"

It was true that this formality had not been deemed necessary. Robinson was temporarily triumphant; but not for long. The key on being tried was found to open the iron safe easily. Starkey spoke again.

"I saw Jarman with that key yesterday morning. He had it on his desk, and I went to speak to him, and he seemed not to want me to see it, and hid it away."

This statement was made in something of a jerky and hesitating fashion, as though the facts were wrung out of him much against his will. His manner of giving evidence was not quite as honest and truthful as a court of justice would

have required, but the hearers accepted what he said as damning evidence of Jarman's guilt, and the case was already very positively made out against him.

Starkey said no more then, but he wished to get away somewhere and think matters over quietly. One thing seemed to him as clear as day—Jarman had used the key to abstract the five-pound note from the safe, the five-pound note out of which he had received a loan of three pounds. The recollection of Jarman's virtuous indignation made his blood boil; but he congratulated himself upon his own sharpness in the business; there was some consolation in that.

"When he found that he was discovered, he'd have blurted out the whole truth, that's very sure. I've stolen a march on him by being the first to peach."





CHAPTER XII.

T did not occur to Frank Pickering, at this early stage of the affair, to feel sorry for his humble friend's unhappy crime, and the certain disgrace and punishment awaiting him. Nor did any tender memory of the poor youth's blind devotion and dog-like fidelity, during the course of the great Evelina love-match, in any way prompt him to try to screen the wrongdoer, or maintain any degree of silence upon the subject of his defalcation.

The object in life of Frank Pickering just now seemed to be to prove that he was the most accurate of book-keepers and reliable of arithmeticians, and also the most injured person upon the face of the earth.

Before the day was half-an-hour older all the persons employed upon Hankershanks's extensive premises were discussing the scandal, and the clerks and workpeople next door were soon well-informed upon the subject; so that the news spreading, with a gently-increasing exaggeration as to the amount of money missing, it was reported at the public-house Josh Waddiman used about two hours afterwards that there had been a great robbery down the lane.

"One of Hankershanks's chaps has bolted with a matter of five hundred pounds."

It was not until some time after noon that James Jarman returned. He came in advance of his employer, who called in somewhere on his way.

Frank and the other clerks were waiting in a flutter of excitement for Hankershanks's return, and were somewhat

shy in the culprit's presence. It might almost have been supposed, by anyone who knew no better, that Jones, Smith, and Robinson were the veritable robbers; with such a shamefaced aspect did they regard Jimmy Jarman's approach, and so studiously did they avoid his eye.

The felonious one came in looking as usual—he had always a hang-dog air with him, and a furtive, sneaking way; everybody of course had noticed that over and over again. He came in now, perhaps, more briskly than he had ever done, and went straight to his desk.

They all watched him searching for something, and noticed that he glanced uneasily across at Starkey. Then he rose and made a sign to that person to follow him out.

Starkey affected surprise. "What do you want?" he asked, innocently.

Jimmy was anxious, it seemed, not to attract general attention. He nodded mysteriously, and made telegraphic signs. The others, watching every movement furtively from behind their desks, lost none of this.

"Come out. I must speak to you."

"To me! What about?"

Starkey followed with these words, and with an expression of injured innocence. Turning at the door, however, he signalled intelligence with the others.

James, not a little surprised at Starkey's manner, awaited his coming, but Hankershanks appearing at that moment upon the threshold of the street-door, he led the way into a warehouse room a little farther on, vacant just then, owing to the workpeople having gone to dinner.

Here, finding they were alone, James at once said what he had got to say.

"I went away in a hurry, and left my desk unlocked."

"Well?"

"I left the key in it, and it has been taken out."

"Well?"

"Do you not understand? I mean the key of the safe?"

Starkey did not immediately reply. Although he had been expecting this interview for the last three hours, and had been endeavouring to prepare himself for it, he was yet unprepared.

Jimmy went on, "You have got it, of course. But you must give it me back."

Starkey had hitherto kept his eyes averted. Now he raised them, screwing up his courage with a great effort.

"I've not got your key. I know nothing of it. What do you mean?"

Jimmy was dumbfounded. He gasped again.

Starkey continued, "There's been a fine row, I can tell you. They know you've been at the safe."

"I been at the safe! How dare you say such a thing?"

Starkey raised his voice and assumed a bullying tone.

"Don't bawl at me like that. I say I know nothing of it, and you know very well where you got that five-pound note."

"The five-pound note I lent you three pounds out of? By-the-way, you have not given me back the change."

"No fear. I'll give that back to the person it belongs to. You're a nice fellow, Jarman, I must say, to come the virtuous adviser over me. It was a pretty 'cute idea of yours, wasn't it, to lecture me, when I talked of borrowing a pound or two, and then when I had shown you the way, to do it yourself, and oblige me with a loan? Now look here, suppose I tell the whole affair?"

"Suppose you did, who would believe that you were not an accomplice," asked James Jarman, very quietly, "after changing the note?"

Starkey rejoined savagely, "What proof is there of the truth of *your* story? Nobody knows I was here last night. And after all I only meant to open the safe. I did not do it. You're not going to get the better of me, please to understand; and if it's to be a matter of swearing, one can swear as well as another."

Poor Jimmy lost all patience. He would have given the world, he thought just then, to be able to heap writhing sarcasm upon this ungrateful wretch, and yet when he would have spoken there were tears trembling in his eyes.

"How can you treat me so? You would have been a thief—a convicted thief, perhaps, if I had not come in time, and as it is—"

"As it is, you stole the money yourself."

"I did not!"

"Come, I say, where did you get your five pounds from? You got it somewhere very early this morning, for last night Josh Waddiman tells me you had only got one shilling in your pocket, when he got you some tea. Who gave you five pounds this morning? Hankershanks himself, perhaps?"

“Yes !” replied Jimmy.

“Yes !” exclaimed Starkey, derisively.

“YES,” another voice rejoined—a voice behind them, which they both well knew. It was the voice of the person whose name they had last used.

Hankershanks himself stood in the doorway.





CHAPTER XIII.

WHEN the head of the house entered the office, a few minutes previously, he saw by the excited looks of the assembled clerks that some startling event had taken place. Frank Pickering had his statement to make.

"Somebody's been at my safe, Sir—where I keep my petty cash, and there's five pounds missing, and another key of the safe, Sir—we found it in Jarman's desk, Sir."

Hankershanks did not wait for further explanation, but followed James Jarman, pushed open the door of the room where he and Starkey were talking, listened, and interrupted the conference, as has been described.

A little crowd of clerks and warehousemen awaited the result of Hankershanks's movements. More than one held himself in readiness to fetch the police.

Hankershanks having his back turned towards them, they followed closely on his heels, and, when he looked round, retreated in haste, bumping up against one another in a way which was wanting in dignity. Presently he came back to the office, followed by Starkey and James, and took his seat at a raised desk, as though on a judgment seat; the two culprits arranging themselves one on either side, with an expression as though of preparation for a great struggle to come.

The other clerks gathered round eagerly, all those getting seats who could do so; the warehousemen, being of an inferior class, keeping in the background and peeping over one another at the open door. It was quite a dramatic scene,

with all the enthusiasm about it of a theatrical trial ; a great eagerness to act as witness on either side, and about anything, was particularly noticeable.

Hankershanks opened the enquiry.

" You accuse Jarman of stealing a five-pound note out of the safe ? " he said to Starkey.

Starkey here would have amended his accusation. " Yes or no ? " enquired the judge imperiously.

Then Starkey put on a bold front. " Yes, I do, " he said bluntly.

Hankershanks went on. " He gave you the note, too, if I understand rightly ? "

" Yes, he did, " defiantly.

" Have you got the note here ? "

" No, I changed it. "

" Where ? "

" At the Feathers, up the lane. "

Hankershanks here produced five sovereigns, and with a wave of his hand indicated that he required the assistance of a messenger. A rush of hirelings thereupon arising, he selected one, whom he despatched to " the Feathers up the lane " in search of the note ; and while he was gone the court waited in silence.

" This note, " said Hankershanks when the note had been brought back, " is one I gave Jarman myself this morning — one I made him a present of. I received it last night, and made an entry of the number in my pocket-book. Pickering ! "

" Yes, Sir, " from Pickering, with much briskness of manner.

" You are five pounds short in your accounts ? Let me see your accounts. "

Accounts produced. Elaborate explanation from Pickering as to the meaning of certain erasures, underlinings, and marginal memoranda ; Hankershanks, very calm and collected, adding up large rows of figures with a steady determination, his brows knitted the while.

Breathless interest among the assembled clerks ; some pushing and shoving in the passage without, and snatches of whispered remonstrance.

Suddenly Hankershanks looked up —

" Here, Pickering, I don't see any mention made of the money you paid for me yesterday afternoon. Here are the

bills, though, receipted. How much do they make together?"

Pickering, blushing very red, then turning very white, began to stammer—

"One is three, seventeen, six, Sir. The other is two, two, six, Sir."

"That makes five pounds, I think," said Hankershanks—"that makes the five pounds you missed, doesn't it?"

Frank Pickering returned an inaudible reply. Poor Pickering! this made matters worse, for Hankershanks roared out in a voice of thunder—

"Is that the five pounds you have been making all this to-do about? Is it owing to your confounded blunder, that your fellow clerk has been called a thief?"

The warehousemen outside—owing to the pushing and shoving, and a timidity among those in the front row, who fell back and half closed the door whenever Hankershanks glanced in their direction—had not followed the course of events too closely; and an idea was prevalent in the passages that Pickering had been convicted a robber, and that it was for him the policeman would, presently, have to be fetched. It was, at any rate, some sort of satisfaction to know that a policeman was to be fetched at all, and many held themselves in readiness to go upon the errand, when the order should come, with all despatch.

Frank Pickering, meanwhile, was making a further reply—still inaudible. Hankershanks waved him off, and went on in his voice of thunder.

"There turns out to be no five pounds missing, and the five pounds this fellow Starkey accuses Jarman here of stealing was given to Jarman by myself. So far, then, the whole of this story of Pickering's is a cock-and-bull story, without a shadow of foundation, and arising only out of his own blunder-headed stupidity."

Mental writhings, as it were, on Frank's part—a whisper circulated in the passage to this effect, "Aint Pickering a-getting of it hot, neither! Aint the gov'nor just a-dusting of his jacket!" Frantic delight among the crowd outside, for no particular reason, except that it is some one else "getting it,"—somebody else's "jacket being dusted"—upon the same principle as that actuating the humble retainers of a pantomime king (King Payne, for instance), when his majesty kicks and cuffs one of their number.

Hankershanks went on :—“ So far, then, the whole business is so much waste of time ; but now with respect to this fellow Starkey, it would seem that very early this morning he broke into the office and made an attempt to rob the safe.”

“ It is a lie,” from Starkey.

Hankershanks, without heeding him : “ Had not Jarman here been fortunately present, engaged upon some important work I gave him to do, this fellow Starkey would have committed a robbery. As it is, he stole nothing, because he was prevented. You can take yourself off, if you do it quickly. I don’t care to take the trouble to prosecute you. Move out of the way, you there at the door, and let him pass.”

Starkey, making some unintelligible protestation, moved toward the door, perhaps not altogether sorry to get off so easily. Upon the threshold, however, Hankershanks called to him.

“ Stop, though, if you please : give Jarman back his five pounds.”

Starkey turned, and answered doggedly—

“ I haven’t got them. I’ve spent three pounds.”

“ Where are the other two ? ”

He came back, and feeling in his pockets very slowly, produced two sovereigns.

“ Bring or send three pounds here between this and six o’clock, and you are at liberty to go where you choose ; if not, I set the police upon you.”

Starkey went away this time without further interruption, and somehow, by hook or by crook, he found the money required of him, and sent it by hand to the office within five minutes of the expiration of the time allowed him. But they saw no more of Starkey himself down that crooked City lane ; nor was he ever after heard of by any except one of the actors in the little drama.

When Starkey was disposed of it was Josh Waddiman’s turn, and terrible was the fury of Hankershanks which descended upon his head. Frank Pickering anon came from the presence in a limp and despondent state, and sat upon the stairs leading to the warehouse rooms above, and wept.

Jimmy found him thus employed, and offered consolation.

“ Don’t take on so about it. What does it matter ? I am sure I don’t care.”

“ I don’t see what you’ve got to care about,” retorted Frank. “ You haven’t come out of it so badly, and if it

hadn't been for you muddling up the accounts so I shouldn't have got into the row at all."

"I'm very sorry if it was my fault," said Jimmy ; "you know I did it to help you, anyhow. I know I'm not a very good one at figures, but then I went over them very carefully once or twice. Besides, I didn't touch your petty-cash account. However, I'm sure I'm very sorry."

On the whole, perhaps, it was noble conduct on Frank's part to forgive the friend he had falsely accused. You will find as you grow older, sanguine and youthful reader, that you must expect to be hated when you are injured, for it is found easier to love one's enemy than one's ill-used friend.

It was altogether an extraordinary day's experiences for James Jarman, following a strangely-eventful night ; and one of the most curious of its many curious incidents had yet to come.

Hankershanks bade him come into his private room during the afternoon, and having fastened the door, shook hands with him.

"You're a queer sort of mixture, Jarman," he said. "You're an unhappy young devil, and will have a miserable time of it before you die, or I'm very much mistaken. But I can understand you a little, I think ; and as far as I can like anyone I like you. You acted to that fellow Starkey very much as I acted a good many years ago to just such another fellow, when I was a clerk myself. He turned round on me afterwards, and robbed me of the love of the only person in the world I ever cared for. I might have died of a broken heart, if I hadn't made up my mind instead to make money. You'll find through life most people cheat you when they have a chance, and do you an injury whenever they get an opportunity. I'll keep my eye on you, and I'll—I'll do you a good turn."

He patted the boy on the back here, and faltered in his speech, as though he were almost inclined to say something kind to him—as if he would have liked to have done so, but was ashamed. Instead, he pushed him towards the door, and said, "That's all—you can go."

So Jimmy went, wondering very much at this strange glimpse of Hankershanks in an amiable light, a hitherto undreamt of phase in his character.

It was, however, a phase which was seen no more—with but one notable exception of which more anon—by either

Jimmy or any other person upon the establishment ; for henceforward in his character of employer did Hankershanks make the most unmitigated brute of himself, and sorely vex, and chafe, and worry all who belonged to him ; to that extent, indeed, that the life of his creatures became a burden to them, and some abandoned his service, risking the fearful penalties set down as heretofore described in the famous document signed, sealed and delivered, and sought refuge in flight.





CHAPTER XIV

HE world up Holloway was going on meanwhile about the same as usual. Evelina's back was said to be a little better. She was said to be a little better generally.

Nothing more had transpired respecting the proposed transportation of dear Frank to the unhealthy part of Jamaica. He weakly supposed that the idea had been abandoned, and prematurely rejoiced.

These were indeed happy days—almost. Frank had quite forgiven Jimmy now. You see his was a love which overflowed, as it were, verbally, and a bosom friend was an absolute necessity. He must have somebody to tell his tale to.

He told his tale to Jimmy at enormous length. There never was such a tale, and it required a concentration of attention upon the listener's part of a serious nature. It was not at all unlikely, that if the listener left off listening even for half a moment, he lost the thread of the narrative, took a wrong view of the case, and got himself later on into hot water by espousing the views of the other side. For there was another side, entertaining opposite opinions to those of dear Frank—opinions which one need hardly say were in every respect monstrously unreasonable and absurd.

The other side was in point of fact “that ass of an old Hickson”—in other words, the beloved one's father—a pigishly obstinate creature, who never could be got to see the point of dear Frank, in whatever light dear Frank was exhibited to him.

An amusing feature in this love affair was that the parents on either side would have it that their respective offspring might have looked higher. There seemed to be a notion harboured in the parental mind, upon the Hickson side, that it was quite likely some of these fine days a person high up in the social scale might be passing by on his prancing palfrey, and looking into the front parlour over the flower-stand, see the fair Evelina reclining upon her couch, and fall in love with and seek her in marriage.

Again, that silly old woman at the fancy repository believed that anyone with the airs and graces of her Frank, might aptly mate with the proudest patrician, and that the female sex generally would only think itself too much honoured by the connexion.

As to the fond ones themselves, they did not entertain these exalted opinions respecting their own worth. Evelina was all in all to her Frank, and Frank was all in all to his Evelina.

They were very devoted. On Frank's nights, Evelina waited for him in a pretty flutter, trembling and blushing at each footfall in the street. Sometimes a common trades-person would come to the door, bringing some of his vulgar wares—groceries, fire-wood, or the like—and she would flutter and tremble at his approach.

But dear Frank's knock she knew among a hundred, and went and opened the door to him herself. The maid-of-all-work knew his knock also, and did not interfere. Frank and his Evelina were generally seven or eight minutes traversing the length of Mr. Hickson's passage from the street door to the parlour.

On Frank's nights he and she sat apart often hand in hand, and the rest of the family pretended not to notice it. It was known to all visitors to the house that they were engaged. Indeed, it was no secret in the street, and the servant girls called one another to the windows of the houses opposite when Frank was seen coming up.

Thus passed away some happy weeks, and Frank began to forget all about Jamaica, when one day Hankershanks re-opened the subject with horrible abruptness.

"You'll have to start in three weeks from now, Pickering," said he one morning : "get yourself ready."

The terrible tidings fell like a thunderbolt that evening in the Hickson's front parlour, and crushed the gentle creature

whose life was wrapped up in Hankershanks's unhappy hiring. A terrible scene ensued—hysterics, smelling salts, burnt feathers; the doctor fetched from the next street; some ungenerous abuse of Frank on the mother's part.

At the fancy repository also there were loud lamentations. “Don’t, don’t, mother, for Heaven’s sake!” Frank cried; “you will drive me mad among you.”

It was wonderful what Jimmy went through at this time in his devotion to his friend. He worked like a horse, without a word of thanks. He performed prodigies of disinterested labour, and nobody took any notice of him whatever.

He was everlastingly hard at it, with messages and parcels. He had not half enough sleep. He had all Frank’s work to do at the office, for Frank had forgiven him that mistake he had never made, and allowed him to render what assistance was in his power;—in other words, he conducted Frank’s duty entirely.

There never were three such wretched weeks as those preceding Frank’s departure, nor, indeed, such tedious weeks to some concerned. Mrs. Hickson was heard to say she’d be glad when it was all over. To Frank and Evelina the prospect was dark and dreary enough, and Frank said he did not care what became of him when they were parted. Sometimes in a tremulous voice, he would begin with, “When I am gone”—but hysterical indications silenced him. Once he said, “When I am no more.”

How terribly quickly the time seemed to have gone, when it was gone!—when the last week came, when the last day arrived. For the last day did come in due course, as days of happiness and days of sorrow will, no faster and no slower for our prayers and tears, our shuddering dread and wild longings.

Your marriage day is settled for to-morrow, and to-morrow is the day appointed for the carrying out of Jack Jailbird’s sentence in the interior of Newgate prison; and the hours fixed for both of these interesting ceremonies will come round to those—and they are many millions—who are not the slightest degree interested in the fate of either of you; they will come like any other hours of the twenty-four—come and pass unnoticed.

The awful day arrived for Frank’s departure. Everything had been got ready. Poor Pickering’s box was packed, and

his fate was sealed, and he was booked for the dismal swamp in Jamaica.

Those who knew nothing of the tales of deadly snakes and deadlier fever, said that his fortune was made. There were many thousands of desperate wretches who would have clutched eagerly at the chance, bad as it was; but Frank was in love, you must remember, and even if he could have seen his way to fortune quite clearly, without the fever or the snakes, he would not have been happy,—for what was fortune without the beloved one? and the beloved one being a fixture in England, and fortune only obtainable in Jamaica, there was no temptation for the devoted Frank.

Indeed the poor young fellow's plight was a most deplorable one. He could not shirk the journey, for his mother would have been ruined by Hankershanks holding her to the letter of her bond. He knew that his affianced bride was too ill to go with him, and believed the shock of their parting would in all probability kill her, and yet how could he avert this evil? He was penniless—powerless.

During the Reign of Terror the condemned Royalists in the Paris prisons, we are told, made merry and made love, ate, drank, danced, diced, passed wild nights of mad merriment and drunken orgie, expecting always that as likely as not the next morning might be their last, and that the dread tumbril would call to take them on their last drive, to where Doctor Guillotin's clever invention was to "make an end on 't." They said in excuse that they wished to show the canaille how blue blood bore itself in the hour of trial, and how game the ancient noblesse could die.

Dear Frank, it is to be regretted, was not as heroical as he might have been, as the last day approached. He broke down frequently and bewailed his fate. As a general rule he bewailed it in his Evelina's presence, when surely he ought rather to have supported and encouraged her in this hour of trial.

Strange to say, several quarrels arose between the true lovers just at the last, and Frank, in great bitterness of spirit, told his mother he was sure that heartless girl would forget him as soon as he was gone. The old lady thought such an event by no means unlikely, but she did not tell her darling so. Instead, she comforted him to the best of her ability, which was not great.

Now and then Frank's mother perhaps felt a little jealous of the sallow beauty's dominion over her darling's heart. To her, Evelina had always been a lean lackadaisical creature, with deep-set eyes, large irregular features, and with something of a discontented poodle-like expression, which the heavy bell-rope curls heightened considerably.

"I can't tell what my Frank can see in her!" was the old lady's exclamation one day when she and Jimmy were upon the everlasting subject.

But that is the way with women. They never can see what we see in other women, and we can never see what they see in other men.

Frank *did* see a great deal in her. Sometimes he left her presence in a rage and came stamping home to be cross to his mother; but next night he was again at the beloved one's sofa-side, and then they made it up, and then it was—Oh blissful, with a big O.

The poor old mother meanwhile pined hopelessly for the love "that girl" had robbed her of. She would sit and watch her darling whilst he ate and drank at tea-time. He often found her eyes filled with tears when he looked at her across 'the tea-table. During the evening she would make all manner of small excuses for being near him, and she would often gently press his hand or pat his head. She would have liked to have sat at the foot of his bed and watched her hero slumber. When slumbering he generally lay on his back and snored.

He was so wrapt up in the great and overwhelming passion, that he had hardly time to notice all this, and the old lady's little love offerings were for the most part thrown away. But what did she care? She wanted no return; so that she might not altogether lose her darling, that was all she cared for.

"Oh! I shall be so lonely when he is gone," she said to James. "How shall I ever bear up against it? But I must, you know; and I must not let my poor boy think I take on so, or else it will make him more unhappy than he is. He has quite enough to bear."

"I wish I could go in his place," said Jimmy.

"Ah, if you could! You have no mother to grieve for you."

"I don't think I have anybody to grieve for me," said Jimmy; "I mean not very much."

From this day James Jarman had a great notion, which was a profound secret, to be imparted to nobody—not even to the friend of his bosom. Henceforth he wrapt himself, as it were, in a cloak of mystery, and took melodramatic strides to appropriate music.

He was more silent than ever, thoughtful, preoccupied. A grand scheme was hatching in his brain; presently he would astonish everybody, or he thought he would. The hour of triumph was approaching. These selfish wretches would be put to shame, would see him in his true light, would know how nobly he had sacrificed himself.

During these days of mystery Jemmy was absent many hours of an evening on secret errands. He was often surprised making inexplicable calculations in his pocket-book, or upon odd scraps of paper. It was said that he had saved money since he had been in Hankershanks's employ. He was heard to jingle gold, and when he thought himself unobserved, he counted and recounted a very small handful of sovereigns.

One day a glimpse of the truth revealed itself. He had made the necessary enquiries and calculations, and found that he had just money enough, if he could get some one to assist him with five pounds, to buy a small a small outfit of the extremest limit of smallness which would serve him for the voyage. If, then, he could get his friends to give their consent, and to help him a little, he might take Frank's place, provided Hankershanks had no objection.

At first sight there seemed no insurmountable difficulties in the way. At home the Whitakers were for ever regretting that he was not permanently provided for, for they could not believe in anybody else employing him should Hankershanks withdraw his patronage.

"Mark my words," the Reverend Mr. Wapshot had often remarked, "that boy will never get on in the world—no, never. That boy wants rousing—he ought to be roused."

The idea that Jimmy wanted rousing was a prevailing idea in the stage carpenter's family; and they roused him pretty frequently, and to such an extent indeed, that the poor little beggar had small peace of his life.

"It is a pity," Mr. Wapshot continued, "that he does not emigrate. In some new country, with plenty of hard work before him, with no kind friends upon whom he could

lean for support, he must rouse himself—he couldn't help himself."

"Do for Goodness' sake, boy," cried Mrs. Whitaker, "take your hands out of your pockets and sit up straight, and look as if you had some life in you."

It seemed to Jimmy that after what had been said he ought not to have much difficulty in persuading the family to see that his transportation in the place of Frank Pickering would be a very good thing indeed ; and one Saturday night he made up his mind to break the matter to them.

He thought it well over, and arranged very carefully all he was going to say. Indeed, he threw a great deal of the nicest ingenuity into his selection of phraseology, and the little plots and plans he formed for leading up to the subject in an artistic style.





CHAPTER XV

ST was a very good night to talk the matter over. The Great Sahara was shut up just at the time, and Sam Whitaker would be at home. There was not much doing in the shop after nine o'clock on a Saturday evening, and Mrs. Whitaker generally put forth all her culinary powers on that day, and made a pie.

Mr. Wapshot, too, very seldom came in on a Saturday : he had his discourses to prepare for the coming Sabbath. Altogether, there could not be a more favourable opportunity.

On his way home Jimmy repeated again and again what he had to say, and more than once came to a standstill, and asked himself in a nervous flutter what the first sentence was to be, which he had forgotten whilst rehearsing the second.

So engrossed was he with his thoughts that his legs could not keep time with them, and again and again he broke out into a run, and yet, when he reached Stonywold Court, he was a little late. The fact was, Mrs. Whitaker's clock was fast, and she had served up supper earlier than usual.

The customary pie had been made, but here again the fates were against James Jarman's little scheme. The customary pie-dish had been accidentally broken, and, at the last moment, a smaller one employed perforce in its stead. Most unexpectedly too Mr. Wapshot had dropped in, and though saying every moment he could not possibly stop another, had at last allowed himself to be persuaded to stop to supper.

Owing, then, to the good lady's perturbation upon this ac-

count, she had somehow made a miscalculation regarding the capabilities of this said pie, and when Jimmy made his appearance he found it all served out in portions, and none left for him.

"Why, bless the boy," cried Mrs. Whitaker, very angry at having made a mistake, "he's always behindhand. There, sit down, will you? It's your own fault."

Jimmy would have explained that if anything he was rather earlier than usual; but had he done so Mrs. Whitaker would have been angrier still, and he was particularly anxious to have her in a good temper.

"The pie's all gone now," said Mrs. Whitaker; "you can't expect people to wait all night for you."

Jimmy was rather hungry, but he knew it would only make matters worse to say so; besides, as the pie was gone, what could be the use of doing so? He therefore said he didn't care for anything particularly. He thought bread and cheese would do.

Mr. Wapshot looked over at him with his mouth full of pie.

"Bread and cheese will do?" he repeated. "What a strange expression, James. How many poor creatures are there who haven't even got bread, without the cheese?"

Jimmy offered no remark. He began to fear that this would not prove as good an opportunity as he had hoped for breaking the matter uppermost in his mind. Pulling the bread and cheese towards him he helped himself, and was just going to begin to eat; but Mr. Wapshot still had his eye on him.

"What, without asking a blessing?"

Hereupon Jimmy was brought up short with a sharp rap on the head from Mrs. Whitaker's knife-handle.

"How can you, James? Put it down, Sir, do, and do what Mr. Wapshot tells you."

But a sort of lump rising in Jimmy's throat, choked his utterance; so Mr. Wapshot, folding his hands over his pie, said grace for him instead, and William, folding his hands over his pie, said "Amen;" and then Jimmy ate several mouthfuls of bread and cheese, that took a great deal of swallowing, and Mrs. Whitaker, shaking her head, said, "Ah, James, I'm afraid you've got a bad heart."

During this episode Sam Whitaker went on steadily with his supper. There was reason to believe that he thought

Mr. Wapshot's way of asking a blessing unnecessarily lengthy. He did not, however, make any objection, or openly rebel against these newly-imported ceremonies. Upon one occasion, while one of these long graces was going on, he made a sort of feint of making ready to begin to eat, but he never did actually begin until the grace was quite finished.

Jimmy kept his eye upon the stage carpenter. It was to him he intended to state his case, and he wanted to do so before all the rest, because otherwise he would have to tell his story over and over half a dozen times. But no favourable opportunity occurred, and the supper was ended before he had spoken.

After supper Mr. Wapshot began to talk, and Jimmy saw no chance of getting in a word. Sam, sitting by the fire-side, smoked his pipe, and then, growing sleepy, pulled off his boots and prepared to take his departure on tiptoe, so as not to interrupt Mr. Wapshot's discourse, or perhaps—who knows?—to avoid having to shake hands and say good-night to him.

Jimmy saw that the last moment had come, and started up.

“Oh, uncle, have you any objection to my going to Jamaica?”

Sam Whitaker was much astonished.

“This evening?” he asked.

The rest listened, open-mouthed. Jimmy explained, not that evening, of course; but very soon—in a few days.

Sam said, “Why Jamaica? Why not Australy?” It took some time to explain to him that it must be Jamaica under the circumstances.

“I'll go and see Mr. Hankershanks on Monday morning, and talk the thing over,” Mr. Whitaker said; but this plan Jimmy did not approve of. At any rate, he would like to break the matter first, as he had not yet got Hankershanks's permission. The question was, would Mr. Whitaker find five pounds to put to the other money James already had, to buy the outfit?

But Mrs. Whitaker was of opinion that the least that Hankershanks could do was to find the outfit himself.

“Or else,” she said, “let him find somebody else.”

Jimmy then explained that he had found somebody else, and that it was a favour to be allowed to go in this other person's place; but Mrs. Whitaker said she would like to hear a little more upon that subject, and she her-

self would go down the first thing on Monday morning and speak to Mr. Hinkershanks.

Here Mr. Wapshot came into the discussion, and suggested that as it was very clear James would never make a place for himself in the world unless he were thoroughly roused, it would be as well to give him the chance, as he had reason to believe some portions of Jamaica might have the desired effect; and he reminded the family that, for a long time past, they had been wishing for an opportunity of finding an opening for James Jarman in the colonies.

The family seemed inclined to take a more favourable view of the case upon this, and it was settled before bed-time that he had better go. The subject was resumed next day and further discussed, and it was settled then that it was the very best thing that could possibly happen to him. In the course of the discussion, some allusion being made by Jimmy to snakes and yellow fever, Mr. Wapshot took the matter up very warily, and hoped that James would not throw away what was, perhaps, his only chance in life.

From the turn the conversation took at this point it would almost have appeared as though all his life through Jimmy had most selfishly kept on refusing to go and make his fortune in Jamaica, because of some cock-and-bull story about snakes and yellow fever.

When at last Jimmy had obtained everybody's consent at home, he went to Hinkershanks, who refused point-blank.





CHAPTER XVI.

AND now the last day had really come. All was settled. Frank was to be the victim. The hour that the ship was to sail had been ascertained, and poor old Mrs. Pickering was to go down with and bid her darling farewell on board.

It had been settled that Jimmy was to accompany them, and they waited until the last moment, in the hope of his arrival. But there must have been some mistake. He was not there at the starting-place to meet them.

"He must have made some blunder," said Mrs. Pickering. "Do you recollect, dear, what you arranged?" But Frank recollects nothing; indeed the cab had twice to return for odds and ends forgotten in the hurry of departure.

Although much out of the way, he insisted that they should pass through the street in which his Evelina resided. She was not to be seen at the window, and all the blinds were down.

"Can anything have happened?" he cried. "Oh, mother, shall I jump out and ask?"

"No, no. We are very late as it is. No, I am sure there is nothing the matter."

And to herself the old lady could not help adding, "Drat those Hicksons' stupidity! Why on earth must they leave their blinds down, in that idiotic fashion, just to frighten my poor boy."

She was not at all nervous upon Evelina's account. She never quite believed that Evelina was really as ill as was re-

presented. It was only because her Frank was so fond of her, that she believed in Evelina at all.

After some delay, they continued their journey. They had to travel to Bristol by rail, and were in hopes of finding Jimmy waiting for them at the station. But he was not there. Frank was very vexed at this—somewhat indignant indeed.

“He must have known what train we were to take, we have talked so much upon the subject.”

“He will surely never let you go, Frank, without saying good-bye. It is really very inconsiderate, when he knows how we depended on him. He might have made himself useful——”

Frank was inclined to take a gloomy view of life, of everybody, and everything.

“Oh, it is all alike!” he said. “Who ever heard of one’s friends helping one? Who ever heard of friendship lasting—of love enduring? Catch him putting himself to any trouble!”

Mrs. Pickering, however, was tempted to give Jimmy another chance of redeeming his character.

“We mustn’t judge him unfairly,” she said; “you know he has run about for us a good deal altogether.”

“Oh, yes—certainly, certainly,” cried the cynical Frank. “He has been devotion itself. I have been inconsiderate. I have overtaxed his powers of endurance.”

Upon making enquiries at the station, it turned out that there were other trains later. They accidentally met one of the officers of the ship, who told them that probably the captain would go down by a later train, or perhaps even by a train next morning, if by any unforeseen event the ship should not sail at the appointed hour.

There was, then, a probability that even yet Jimmy would retrieve his character. Mrs. Pickering, anxious to make every allowance for him, suggested they ought not to give him up until the last train that night.

The mother and son made somewhat of a dreary journey of it down to Bristol. We all know these journeys preceding a parting. How we hope for, and yet dread the ride’s end—how we console ourselves for the cold and discomfort by the reflection that even these are far preferable to what is coming, that at least we are suffering in company with those we love.

It was a cheap train which conveyed Mr. and Mrs. Pickering down to the ancient maritime city and it stopped at every station. The officer whom they had spoken to, rode with them in a second-class carriage, and did his best to cheer them on the way.

He had made the voyage ever so many times, and had seen some rough weather. He did not think that wrecks very often occurred. The ship was a good one, was at any rate seaworthy, but the accommodation for officers and crew was as bad as it well could be. When once fairly started upon this subject, their companion grumbled at his own lot, at intervals, all the rest of the journey.

When they arrived at their journey's end, they went straight on board, and Mrs. Pickering immediately insisted on seeing which was Frank's berth, and judging with her own eyes whether it looked comfortable. It looked anything but comfortable, she thought, and there was, it seemed to her, no room to turn round in it.

"Quite room enough," their friend the officer told them; "one wants to be snug and close when the rolling sets in."

After all, then, there were to be rolling seas, mountains high! angry waves! furious winds! this great ship tossed to and fro like a chip upon the raging waters, and her darling at the mercy of the elements!

She sat down for a moment feeling faint and giddy. The scene in all its terrors came before her, and instinctively her fingers tightened upon her boy's arm. At any rate she had him safe yet. The wind had not risen.

"The old lady is poorly, I think," the officer whispered; "the fatigue of the railway has been too much for her. Stay, and I will run and fetch her something from the steward."

When they were left alone the mother could sob for a few moments unrestrained upon her child's breast. But she calmed herself quickly, knowing that this display of emotion would unman him.

"It is very selfish of me to grieve so at losing you, dear," she said, "when I know that this change will be the making of you. And seven years at the outside, what is it—if you only keep your health?"

That was the point. If he only kept his health! But the place where Hankershanks's branch establishment was

situated seemed to have been a perfect sepulchre for Hankershanks's clerks. Fever had swept away two-thirds. The snakes had bitten the remainder. Their friend the officer had been compelled to admit, when closely pressed, that the climate in some parts of Jamaica was uncommonly trying, and that if he might believe what he had been told, the bite of the Jamaica snakes was particularly deadly.

The mother and son went on shore, and had a meat tea at an hotel, where the old lady engaged a bed. Then they walked about the town, and as they found the walk particularly dull, they went to the theatre. Long afterwards they recollect ed this miserable evening. The performances consisted of *Venice Preserved*, and a "favourite farce ;" but there were two of the audience who did not enjoy themselves in the least.

Several times during the evening Frank, pulling out his watch, wondered how things were going on at Holloway,—what Evelina was doing—whether she was very ill. His mother, as patiently as she could, talked with him on this soul-engrossing topic, and when she lost patience, directed his attention to what was passing on the stage.

He returned to the vessel, and it was agreed that she should come and bid him good-bye the first thing in the morning. Neither of the two slept much that night. But how was it Jimmy had not come? Was it possible, Mrs. Pickering suggested, that Hankershanks would not give him a holiday, to see his old friend off? Once Frank wondered whether it were possible he had not money enough to pay his railway fare. But this could not be the cause of his absence, for Mrs. Pickering had given him the money, forcing him to take it, in spite of many objections, because, as she said, he was putting himself to this expense on her son's account.

"That makes his conduct worse," said Frank; "I did not think so badly of him."

In the morning all the passengers were assembled on board by the captain's express desire at a very early hour, but the captain had not come down. He was, however, expected by the first train, and presently a cry was raised of "Here he is!"

The poor mother's heart seemed to stop beating; it was as though some one had cried, "Here comes the execu-

tioner." But few moments were left to them now. She would really have to say good-bye at last.

But it proved to be a false alarm. The captain had not come ; something detained him, an officer said, who was to have come down with him, but had come by himself.

There was some one else for the ship. Another passenger? No, all the passengers were on board. Who then ? A very pale young lady with heavy black ringlets, that fluttered with a green veil in the wind.

"Look, look, mother ! See who it is ?"

But the old lady's eyes were dimmed with tears, and she could not see plainly, and next moment Frank was pressing his Evelina to his heart.

"Oh ! my dearest one," he cried, "what brought you here ? Oh, this is noble of you—noble !"

Evelina sobbing in his arms replied incoherently,

"I cannot live without you, Frank. I have tried—oh ! I have tried, but I cannot. If you go, Frank, I must go with you."

"But it is impossible."

Frank naturally thought of the extremely limited scale of the accommodation which had been allotted to him, and, as it was, how very cramped he had been for space during the night.

Evelina went on sobbing. Then a desperate idea took possession of Frank's mind. As it was certain he could not take Evelina with him—it was pretty sure the captain would not allow it—why not throw up his own passage ? Why not defy Hankershanks, run all risks, run away altogether, and he and his Evelina begin the world together, and seek their fortunes somehow, as true lovers have done before and found it answer—in books ?

But the recollection came to him next moment, that he had a mother who had a fancy repository, and that upon her and it would fall the chief weight of Hankershanks's vengeance, and then he said, "Let us be calm. Let us be reasonable."

They were as calm and reasonable as they could be after this, and talked things over quietly, with bursts of rapture intervening ; and the time quickly passed away until the next train arrived, by which the captain came down at last, and preparations for immediate departure were commenced.

But the captain had not come down alone. There was

somebody else for the ship. A passenger? No, that could not be, and yet it must be a passenger, because he had a box with him. Evidently a passenger, and an excited one, who waved aloft an umbrella as a signal that the ship was not to set sail before he got on board.

Frank, looking in the direction in which the others were looking, recognised James Jarman.





CHAPTER XVII.



FTER all, then, Jimmy had not forgotten his friend. Forgotten him, indeed! If Frank Pickering had only known how hard he had been working in his cause!

The previous day had been a tremendously busy day at the warehouse down the crooked City lane, and Hankershanks had been in such a bad temper that there was no approaching him with safety. Jimmy wanted to get his permission to leave about noon, but when that hour approached it would have been more than his place was worth to make such a request. The result was that Jimmy put off asking until after office hours, and then Hankershanks having gone away, suddenly he determined to call in Bloomsbury Square, get leave to stop away next day, and start by one of the night trains.

It was a dangerous experiment to go and beard the lion in his den, but then Jimmy could not bear the idea of failing to see his friend off.

"He'll be in an awful rage," the lad thought as he raised his hand to the bell-pull; and when he heard what a noise he had made by the jerk he had given the wire, he for a moment felt half inclined to run away.

Hankershanks, after a long pause, came down himself to open the door. His greeting was not very encouraging.

"What the devil do *you* want?"

"I wanted to ask you before you left the office to allow me to stop away to-morrow."

"Why?"

"I want to see my friend off in his ship."

"That fool Pickering?"

"My friend Pickering."

"Come inside."

James followed him in and up stairs to the attic which Hankershanks used as sitting-room and bed-room. The place was very dirty and smelt strongly of red herrings; the latter circumstance attributable, James presently found out, to the fact that certain culinary operations were in progress.

The old man emptied some things off a chair on to the floor,—among them a plate which broke as it fell,—and told Jimmy to sit down. He then went to look after his gridiron, and was for some minutes occupied in transferring its contents to a dish upon the table. This feat achieved, he sat down to his tea, and ate and drank in silence. Jimmy looked on. He was so long about his meal, however, his companion began to feel almost afraid that his presence was forgotten; and yet, as he sat directly opposite to Mr. Hankershanks, this was scarcely possible.

At last the silence was broken.

"This Pickering is a friend of yours, then, is he?"

"Yes, Sir, a very dear friend."

"To be sure. You wanted to take his place at Jamaica, didn't you?"

"Oh, Sir, if you would have allowed me to do so, you would have caused such happiness! His mother is nearly heart-broken about his going, and she cannot afford to pay the penalty and keep him here. He was engaged to be married, too; and the poor young lady is too ill to go with him. Oh, if you had only let me go!"

"Do you still wish to go?"

"If there were time, Sir, I should like it above anything in the world. They would all be so delighted! It would make them so happy!"

"To get rid of you, eh? And you would sacrifice yourself?"

"It is no sacrifice. I have no reason for wishing to stop here——"

Hankershanks went on with his tea, for a few more minutes. Then sat thinking.

"Perhaps there's not time?"

"Oh yes, Sir, I think so. There's a train to-night abou

ten, and one to-morrow morning early, if the ship does not go exactly when they say it will."

Hankershanks was silent again, and presently rose to look at his watch.

"It is half-past seven now. You would have time to go and fetch a few clothes from home, and bid them good-bye. You had better take a cab there and back——"

Jimmy sprang delightedly to his feet and prepared to go. Hankershanks opened his purse.

"Here are two ten-pound notes. Put them away somewhere safely. Come back here, and I will go with you to the station. Can you let yourself out?"

Like one in a dream, Jimmy answered, and walked towards the door. When he was passing out, Hankershanks called to him—

"You'll think of all this some day, and think what a fool you have been. I had taken a fancy to you—never mind. Go your own way. There are some people who have these chances, and chuck them in the road. I'll do something else with my money."

Jimmy passed out without comprehending his meaning. It was only long afterwards that he fully understood what his eccentric employer was hinting at, and then Hankershanks was dead, and it was too late.

When Jimmy reached Stonywold Court, he found that Mrs. Whitaker and William had gone to a prayer-meeting, it being Wednesday evening. Sam Whitaker was at the theatre, busy with the scenery of a forthcoming novelty. Only Ann was left at home. He went into the parlour behind the shop, where she was sitting.

"Well, Ann," he said, "I am going."

"Going where?"

"To Jamaica."

"To Jamaica, after all? And when will that be?"

"In a few minutes. I have just come in to say good-bye, and fetch my things."

Ann rose in excitement at this news, and let fall her work.

"But, James, you can't go like that! They are all out. You must wait till they come in, or till I fetch them."

"Never mind them, Ann. You must say good-bye for me. Will you come and help me pack my box?"

She followed him up stairs, and they got the things ready.

together, and filled a small trunk with Jimmy's effects. When they were all in they shook rather loosely as he carried them down stairs.

While they were packing, Ann said—

“Jamaica is a long way off, isn't it?”

“I think it takes about two months to get there in a sailing ship.”

“It is a long way, then.”

They went on packing.

“You have not been very happy at home here, have you, Jimmy?”

“Not very happy—lately.”

“I thought you hadn't.”

Down in the parlour Jimmy paused to look around. Had he forgotten anything? No: then he had better be off. There was no time to spare.

“I must say good-bye now, Ann, I suppose.”

“Yes, I suppose—Good-bye.”

“Good-bye.”

They shook hands, and Jimmy prepared to lift up his trunk.

“I wish I had been kinder to you, Jimmy.”

Jimmy's eyes filled suddenly. She held out her hand again, and her face, and he kissed her. He was going to say something, but just then the shop-bell tinkled. Somebody had come to spend a penny. As Ann did not go for a moment, the penny was knocked impatiently upon the counter.

Meanwhile Jimmy shouldered his small trunk, and then walked hurriedly out. Next moment the cab drove away. Then Ann served her customer mechanically, and coming to the door, looked wistfully out into the darkness.

A man with a street organ, the very same man who came that night two or three years ago, when Jimmy ran away, came up, and began to play a simple air popular at the time. Ever afterwards, when she heard the same tune again, Ann used to think of the old days in Stonywold Court—the mean little shop—the prayer-meetings—the person who was so impatient to spend a penny—Jimmy, going away for ever, carrying his box.



CHAPTER XVIII.

JT was indeed Jimmy, with this same box, and with an umbrella which Hankershanks gave him. He brought with him, too, a letter for the captain. It was from the great Mr. Hankershanks, making some monetary arrangements about the change of passengers. The captain was personally known to Hankershanks, and the matter could therefore be settled without any great difficulty, when Jimmy's object was once understood.

But it was not a very easy matter to make all concerned understand it. Frank Pickering, for instance, had so thoroughly given himself up to despair, that it was almost impossible to convince him that all hope was not gone: that, on the contrary, he was saved from the jaws of the Jamaica snakes—that he and his Evelina need not be parted after all.

At this moment, when all was bustle and confusion, when there was not an instant to spare either for explanation or future plans, poor Evelina's overtaxed strength unfortunately gave way, and she fainted. Therefore, as Frank and Frank's mother had enough to do to look after her, and convey her safely to the shore, there was nobody to see to Frank's luggage but Jimmy Jarman; and as he was away looking after it, there was no time to thank him for the service he had rendered his friends.

It was not possible to get all Pickering's effects away, because some were not at the moment come-at-able, and it occurred to Jimmy, that as they would be of use to him on the voyage, and useless now to his friend, that he might as

well buy them. At the last moment, then, he hurriedly put the case to Frank, and thrust one of the ten-pound notes into his hand, saying, from what he recollects, that must be about the value of the goods. Frank subsequently said that Jarman got them a great bargain, but he generously added that he did not grudge his gaining by the transaction, after the kind way he had acted.

And now at last all the passengers for shore had departed. Frank and his mother, and his Evelina, and his box, were all safely landed. Evelina, happily, was showing signs of returning consciousness.

Already she had opened her eyes, and looked wildly round—had seen her Frank, and ecstatically murmured his name.

“You are not gone, then?—not yet!—not yet!”

“I am not going at all, dearest,” Frank whispered, and pressed her hand in his.

Meanwhile the ship was in motion, and passing out of sight. When they came to think the matter over, during their first moments of calmness, they all at once recollects that no one had shaken hands with their benefactor and wished him good-bye.

Thus, then, the vessel started on the voyage, which was to carry James Jarman to the land of snakes and fever. It was a foggy morning, and the rising mists soon hid the ship from sight. He was gone for good or for bad. He was gone, and they never more were to look upon that strange thoughtful face, that slight meagre form, which for some months past had been a familiar presence.

In Stonywold Court they talked the matter over at some length. Mr. Wapshot, indeed, discoursed eloquently upon the subject, and while he talked Ann sat apart, her chin resting on her hand, gazing into the fire.

“What’s the matter, Ann?” Mrs. Whitaker asked.

“I’ve got a headache,” the girl replied. “I think I’ll go to bed.”

Down the crooked lane the house of Hankershanks was harder at it than ever, and Hankershanks more severe and overbearing. Within six months Frank Pickering got his discharge; and went home to live with his mother until

something else turned up : but nothing did turn up for some time to come.

Within a year that affair with Evelina Hickson, about which a good deal has been said off and on in this volume, was finally broken off by the young lady herself ; for it fell out that when she was at Bristol, she met some friends of her family, and they persuaded her to stay there for a few days, which she did with her parents' consent, and the change of air did her a great deal of good ; and it was, in fact, while she was down there that she met the very Captain O'Grady who was the cause of an estrangement between her and her beloved Frank.

Thus then the world went round ; and the good ship *Sea Swallow* went upon her way, and fell in with angry winds, and went down in lat. $22^{\circ} 10'$ N., long. $73^{\circ} 32'$ W.





III.

LAT. $22^{\circ} 10'$ N., LONG. $73^{\circ} 32'$ W.

CHAPTER I.

N board this same *Sea Swallow*, James Jarman fell a-dreaming with his eyes open, and dreamed a dreadful dream.

They had not been out in the open sea more than a couple of days, when Jimmy awaking one morning, thought he would like to lie a little longer after he had been called to breakfast, and lay there in his berth all day.

Hearing that it was not sea sickness which kept him thus confined to his cabin, and wondering somewhat at the description given him by the steward, the doctor came to see how Jimmy was getting on. A while after, he spoke rather gravely to the captain.

"That young fellow who took his friend's place—I almost wish he hadn't been in time."

"Why so?" the captain asked.

"Because he might as well have died on shore."

"As bad as that?"

For many days James Jarman still lay in his berth, and lying there lost count of time and place. His world grew in these weary days to be so very limited a world, and he got so used to its narrow dimensions, he could not bring himself to believe that there had ever been another and wider one in which he had played a part.

No, it could not be otherwise. All his life he had been lying here. He knew the peculiarities of the cabin so well, every knot in the wood, every flower in the moulding. He

could not know these so well if he had not lain always there, where he was lying now, listening to that strange rushing sound never ceasing upon the outside of the wooden partition, outside the world.

This idle life was not without its anxieties either. Sometimes he would think to himself, "How can I afford to go on lying here for everlasting, doing nothing?" and then there came the comforting thought, however it might be done, it was done, and things had gone on very comfortably for a long while—always, was it not?

But when would this life come to an end? When he reached Jamaica? Where was Jamaica? How far off? Why was he going there? Why had not his friend, Jimmy Jarman, gone in his stead? Would Hankershanks marry Evelina, now that Mr. Wapshot had married Mrs. Pickering? What made that rushing noise on the outside of the world? Some one when he asked had said it was the sea. What was the sea? Was it wet?

This puzzling question distressed him more than any other. He was thoroughly convinced that he had got to do with a dry sea. It could not possibly be a sea of water similar to any other sort of water, when he so near it was yet so hot, and dry, and parched. That point was settled, then, it was a dry sea of dead leaves—of bleached bones perhaps; but an ever-restless sea of some sort, always rushing past—rushing past on the other side of the panel.

He communicated some of his thoughts upon this point to the steward, who said—

"Try and go to sleep, it will do you good."





CHAPTER II.

HERE came a day at last when the rushing sound suddenly ceased, leaving only a faint buzzing in the sick lad's ears, and then the world left off rocking, and stood quite still.

The doctor that day came down to see Jimmy in his cabin. Jimmy could not for a long while understand who this strange gentleman could be who called on him so regularly, and shook hands so kindly. And the doctor said, "You're better now. You'll be all right soon, I hope; only you must keep very quiet."

"Yes, I should like to keep quiet," said Jimmy.

He felt that he ought to keep quiet as long as he could, for they had told him he would be sure to be roused when he got to Jamaica.

Now that the sea had stood still, he began to hear noises overhead—the swift hurrying to and fro of naked feet—the tread of heavy boots—the rattling of chains. One day being shaken by a series of severe bumps, he asked what was the matter, and was told by the steward that they were taking in water on deck. Two days after this, the doctor coming down again to see him, said, "You must try and get well now; I've so many others to attend to."

After this it seemed to him that the doctor looked very pale and worn himself when he paid his next two or three visits, and then suddenly his visits ceased, and the steward came to him and said—

"The doctor's dead!"

A short time after this, Jimmy began to notice that the other person who shared his cabin did not go on deck in a morning, as he had been wont to do, but lay all day in his berth, and rolled from side to side and groaned. Then the rushing sound began again, only much louder than it had been before, and the world rolled to and fro and pitched with an unusual motion.

This motion continued and grew worse, as it seemed to Jimmy, and strange noises overhead annoyed and terrified him; but his illness had grown worse too, and he found it more difficult than ever to understand what was passing around. Some snatches of talk, however, reached him from time to time, and once he heard the captain say—

“We’re in a sorry strait now if this gale continues, for half our men are laid up, and every one is more or less stricken with the malady.”

Jimmy could not tell how he came to know it, but he did soon know that the malady the captain had spoken of was brought on board in the water, and that from its effects many had died,—among them the doctor.

Waking from his dreams again for a few moments, either before or after the captain had spoken, he heard a passenger speak,—a passenger who had made the voyage several times before, and who was complaining of the quality of the ship.

“An old tub like this will never hold out if we’re to have much rough weather.”

“There’s no fear yet though,” some one else said.

“No, not yet. This is nothing.”

A sailor’s voice reached him next, answering another passenger.

“Danger? — no. Danger of what? It’s only a little fresh.”

This little freshness which rocked the vessel like a cradle, and scattered the contents of the cabin far and wide, swelled presently into a raging tempest. Then the wind increasing in its fury, shrieked amongst the canvas and cordage, and the waves thundered against the ship’s sides, and rolling over the deck washed away a man or two, whose hold upon rope, or rail, or ring-bolt was not firm enough; and then a heavy sea was shipped, and with a tremendous crash the mainmast was carried away and the ship was all at once a wreck,

But all this while the sick lad still lay in a dreamy, senseless state, with but a vague glimmering of what was passing around. He heard the heavy tramp of feet, the sound of angry elevated voices—of an indescribable confusion. He had a sort of dim notion that it was very probable his last moment was not far off, and that he would sink with the sinking ship and drown like a rat in a hole, but he did not feel sufficiently interested to rouse himself.

Lying there neglected,—for this was not a time to think much of such useless lumber as sick and dying men,—Jimmy caught snatches of strange talk from passers-by, and now and again pale frightened faces looked in at the door, and their owners' eyes wandered wildly round as though in search of some place of safety—some means of escape.

He heard a father bidding his wife and children farewell, lest when the last dreadful moment should come he might be separated from them. He saw a woman, young and beautiful, but with disordered dress and loosened hair, who tossed on high her arms, and sobbed and raved in her rage and terror at having thus to die so young.

There was one man—a man of about fifty years of age, slight, meagre—with sallow cheeks and sharp features, who peeped in at the door of the cabin, and fancying the place unoccupied came in and was very busy under the swinging lamp. Jimmy watched him curiously, and saw that he had gold and notes, which he stowed away very carefully in an oilskin bag and buttoned in his breast. He evidently had made up his mind not to land a beggar upon shore if he were lucky enough to reach it with life. But this man, with the rest, was doomed to die.

He saw, too, another passenger who was bent on saving all he could of his earthly goods—a scared creature with an ashy face ; and this deluded one was holding on most tenaciously to a hat-box and an umbrella, as though he were only on a Thames steamer, and intended to step on shore at the next pier. But this one did not even reach the boats in which the others left the fated vessel, for a great wave washed him from the deck, luggage and all.

What other sights and sounds were there ! Groups of frightened women screaming and sobbing ! Every now

and then a sailor rushing below, panting for breath, half naked, gazing hurriedly around,—then hurrying away again responsive to some loud, impatient voice on deck.

And then the motion grew more violent, the cabin seemed turned upside down, the light went out, and there was a deafening crash. Then Jimmy, thrown violently from his berth, lay half stunned by the fall.





CHAPTER III.

HE sea at rest. A dead silence. A faint bluish light breaking in through some aperture overhead.

The moon was shining in upon him. He lay cold and wet upon the floor, too weak to move. Some overturned furniture in front of him had hidden him probably, if they had come to look for him before they took to the boats.

Perhaps they had not come. At any rate they were gone now. They had left him, perhaps thinking him dead. He was alone on board the ship! Quite alone; in an awful silence left to die!

But presently, as he lay there helpless, he heard a faint rustling sound not far off. Somebody or something, man or beast, with a painful motion as though its limbs were crippled, was crawling down the cabin stairs to the saloon, into which the door of James's cabin opened.

Looking out earnestly, he in a few moments saw come between him and the light a man's figure, bare-headed, dressed only in shirt and trousers, with naked arms and breast.

He heard then a cautious creeping sound followed by the violent jerking open of a door, and the jingling and smashing of glass. A moment's silence and then the sound of drinking in great gulps. The figure came back then into the light, and waved its bare arms, brandishing in one hand a bottle, and stood still to gaze in at the cabin door.

With an instinctive sense that he had to do with a drunken madman, and was entirely helpless and at his mercy, the lad, exerting all his little strength, strove to shrink away into the darkness ; but he had not the power to do so, and the moonlight fell full upon his face.

The other cried out to him, " Hallo there ! aren't you dead too ? The rest they've left behind are dead ; I've counted them. There are four. We're six in all."

He raised the bottle to his lips and drank and laughed ; and then, to Jimmy's inexpressible relief, turned and crawled away again up the cabin stairs to the deck above.

Then the dead silence was once more unbroken, and the moonlight streaming in, in one long narrow ray, alone relieved the pitchy darkness covering all else. It was bitterly cold.

Later on in the night, the sound of wild laughter reached him, and a succession of shrill cries and a splash. Once he fancied he heard some one on the cabin stairs,—and waiting and watching in intense horror, swooned away again.

When he opened his eyes again, day had broken, and the first faint streaks of dawn replaced the moonbeams. All was perfectly silent now. He still felt the cold ; but had only a confused sense of pain or ought else. He had begun to dream again, and in his dreams the long hours of day passed away, and the twilight gathered round him.

But then a noise upon the deck above aroused him, and steps upon the cabin stairs, and some figures with lights came to look in at him, stooped over him and raised him up.

" Here's one here who has yet a spark of life in him."

" Not dead ? "

" Not quite."

No, he was not dead. He had got his part to play in a strange drama over there in the old country. It had been better, perhaps, had he died here.

And now, in a few plain words, the history of what had happened. The crew and passengers, with the exception of Jimmy and the sick and delirious man in his cabin, both supposed to be too ill to move—had taken to the boats, and those boats were swamped before they could reach

the shore. James Jarman, thus left to die, was, of all the ship's load, the only survivor when a boat's crew from a passing vessel boarded the deserted wreck. Within six hours of his rescue, the gale again sprang up, and what was left of the ill-fated vessel went to the bottom, lat. $22^{\circ} 10' N.$, long. $73^{\circ} 32' W.$





IV

AT A HOUSE WITHOUT A NUMBER.

CHAPTER I.

 WIDOW lady—a Mrs. Whitaker—lived, just ten years ago, with her daughter, at a house without a number, in a street without a name, on the outskirts of a bran-new rising half-built neighbourhood, S.E. of London, called Straggleton New Town.

This neighbourhood had begun some time before with a railway station, where trains arriving set passengers down in the middle of marshy wastes, a good mile away from anywhere any one seemed likely to want to go. Then there had come a gas works. Several rows of ten-pound tenements followed. Then a public-house—a Forlorn Hope set out so as to catch all four winds without attracting any particular custom.

After this some shops. To begin with, a chemist's. Two provision stores opened almost simultaneously, each kept in the dark by the landlord regarding the rival establishment. A draper, a sanguine hatter. Another chemist! A tobacconist, combining periodicals; a baker, a butcher, a green-grocer, an undertaker,—the last on a large scale, thoroughly prepared to bury all the rest of the neighbourhood if need be.

Almost immediately after these shops opened, they began to fail. Some of them had a sickly look about them from the first day. Their scanty stock spread out left great gaps in the windows and on the shelves. Flies settled down upon and dealt destruction to the show goods. The sun bleached, browned, curled and shrivelled what the flies left

unspoilt. As for the public, they did not seem to care about buying anything in the New Town, getting credit perhaps at other shops a long way off in the Old Town, or obtaining their purchases cheaper in London itself.

Some of the private streets were remarkably unlucky in their tenants, and there was one particular street, too, more unlucky than the rest. Here, before No. 3 was quite built, the people at No. 1 had the brokers in. There were tenants who took the houses hopefully, and made all the necessary arrangements, except paying in advance, but never moved into the houses, and where nowhere to be found when wanted for the rent. There were others again who moved in, and presently out, just before the rent was due, conveying away cartloads of goods right under the very noses of the police, who yet saw nothing.

One day in the *London Gazette* three bankrupts simultaneously filed their petitions from Straggleton New Town. Then the neighbourhood began to get an unlucky name. Even the sanguine chemist gave it up as a bad job, and took to pool at the hostelry of the Four Winds.

A rumour spread through the New Town one night that the person who had taken the fancy repository—it began in the tobacco line with half a window devoted to current periodical literature)—had blown his brains out. This dreadful news proved happily to be without foundation. He had only said he had a good mind to blow his brains out. Poor creature, trade had been desperately bad with him. He had had sufficient provocation to urge him to this desperate act, some of the neighbours were willing to admit; but somehow there was something soothing in the idea that someone else was making a very poor thing of it.

A few days afterwards posters were stuck about upon the walls and hoardings of the New Town, which bore reference to a sale about to take place, the particulars of which caused much astonishment to those who stopped to read.

For instance, the following :—

“ Lot 1. One gross of mixed furniture.

“ Lot 2. Three gross of assorted kites.

“ Lot 3. One gross of dolls’ heads, assorted.

“ Lot 4. Two dozen push toys, and various animals loose.

“ Lot 5. One gross of assorted bellows toys.

“ Lot 6. Four gazelle heads, caricature soldiers, dandies and bookworms.

"Lot 7. Exhibition balls various, marbles, tambourines and pianofortes.

"Lot 8. One gross assorted soldiers of all nations."

These wonderful things formed part of the stock at the repository, for its proprietor, as the man at the Forlorn Hope public-house put it, had "broken up—broken up very small indeed." Eventually it was believed he did really blow his brains out in another new neighbourhood.

Meanwhile a new man came to Straggleton New Town and took the departed toyman's shop, and it got about that everybody said,—which meant, one person had said so at the Forlorn Hope—that the new man was the right sort, and would make his way. It was enquired timidly by some already established in trade, who did not make much way themselves, and rather dreaded any opposition, what particular line the new comer was likely to open in.

No precise information being forthcoming upon this point, those who knew everything said, "Whatever line it is, he's the right sort, depend upon it."

There certainly was a confident style about the new man when he talked of what he was going to do, and the way it was going to be done. The landlord entered reluctantly into his plans of improvement in the shop and premises, but the new man carried his point in many respects. The new man was young, but he had every faith in himself. Though his scheme when revealed did not strike the landlord as remarkably likely—apart from the fact that whatever so energetic a young man took up must be made to pay—the idea of there being at last a faint hope of getting some rent somehow carried him away; he even was weak enough to consent to a new shop window.

The scheme was large and comprehensive. Fancy goods, stationery, pianos for hire, a circulating library, a judicious selection of magazines and periodicals, bookbinding in all its branches, pictures framed, artists' materials, and a post-office.

For many days before the new shop burst forth in all its splendour upon the Straggleton New-Towners, notices were posted up and freely circulated, and a prospectus was left at every house, which was a wonder of composition and capital letters. One was left at the house without a number, in the street without a name, and Mrs. Whitaker, reading it, cried—

"Bless me! Frank Pickering! Can that now be the same Frank Pickering, Ann, who was to have gone to Jamaica when our poor James went in his stead?"

"How can I say, mamma?" replied a pale-faced girl wearily, and, without turning to look at the circular, she went on staring out of window, and yawned as she did so.

The look out from this house without a number, down this nameless street, into the brickfield beyond, was of the dreariest. Opposite was a skeleton-house. Next door a foundation only had been laid. It was said that one block of desolate and deserted brick frameworks, which seemed to be falling to decay before they were half finished, had been run up only to borrow money upon, and were "the valuable freehold property" alluded to so invitingly in the advertisement that caught the capitalist.

With regard to the street's name, or want of name, no exact information was forthcoming. The street of course had two sides to it, and each side had a separate proprietor. Differences had arisen between these proprietors, and one had called his side one thing, and the other another. Then the two gentlemen had been brought into friendly communication, and a sort of compromise had resulted. Both sides of the street in future were to be called alike, and the only question was which was to be called which.

In the end a new name was decided on, and both the old names painted out; but half way through the business, more unpleasantness arose between the owners, and the street, in the end, was left without any name at all. Nobody knew any more about the matter, and things had rested in this way for a couple of months or so.

The house without a number, wherein Mrs. Whitaker resided, was one of several houses also without numbers, and remaining thus unnumbered because the proprietor appeared to be in doubt as to which end he should begin at with number one. It was a very small house, and new, and smelt strongly of paint and damp size. Before it was a very small garden, where, alone in their glory, flourished Brobdignanian marigolds in diminutive beds, hardly less stony than the gravel paths surrounding them.

The Whitakers—mother and daughter—had, upon the authority of those Straggleton New-Townspeople, learned in the affairs of their neighbours—seen better days, and these better days alluded to they had seen since you last heard of

them. Those railway shares which you may recollect Sam Whitaker was just beginning to dabble in, had turned out wonderfully well. There was a golden era in the Whitaker chronicles, when the ex-stage-carpenter's family held up their heads with the best, and lived most genteelly.

With his increasing success, Sam Whitaker's ambition rose in proportion, and he began to muse on lofty flights not dreamt of in the old court philosophy. Hitherto Mrs. Whitaker had, as it were, but looked at life from a two-penny-half-penny point of view. She could scarcely believe her senses when one day Sam began to speak of shutting up the shop and cutting the carpentering at the Great Sahara.

It may be remembered that Sam's very stupidness in speculation was the cause of his greatest successes. He was so horribly slow, he never sold out at the moment when the knowing ones brought him positive information that an immediate smash was inevitable ; and leaving his money invested in what was "certain sure" to be a failure, found curiously enough that it wasn't a failure after all, and that he had made a very good thing of it.

Others besides the knowing ones, too, endeavoured to persuade him that the course he was pursuing was a wrong one—morally wrong as well as pecuniarily ruinous. Mr. Wapshot, upon several occasions, made the evil effects of the spirit of gaming the subject of his discourses ; and William Bradshaw had something to say also upon the matter.

Though ashamed to own it, during the latter years of his life Sam Whitaker grew to be desperately afraid of his nephew William, who set him straight upon many occasions, cut off his grog, put out his pipe, and gave him, to use the carpenter's own words, "chapter and verse for it." One thing is certain—however unsatisfactory the moral pointed—if Sam Whitaker had only listened to the advice of the persons who ought to have known how to advise him, he would have lost his money.

While he "acted like a fool," he made gold out of all he touched. It was only when he became a knowing one himself, and everybody had learnt to believe in his infallibility, that he "dropped" so heavily, and at last ruined himself altogether by the very "safest thing in all the world," about which there wasn't the slightest possible risk.

After his ruin it was a favourite pastime of our bold speculator to calculate what he would have gained if he had not “put his money on” where he did. He never would allow, either, that there was any fault on his side. The unparalleled perversity of circumstances, and the diabolical machinations of villains, no man could have stood up against.

But the splendours of that brief period of prosperity were never to be forgotten. At the house without a number, in Straggleton New Town, there existed a dusty and much-thumbed record of the condescension of the upper classes, in a little papier-maché basket, full of fly-blown visitors’ cards, which stood in the centre of a loo-table in the parlour, the most distinguished ones on the top, and the second-raters propping them up from underneath.

A panic, which swept away many fortunes, swept the furniture out of one particular house in Porticolo Square, where its owner had settled and set up a carriage. At the time that Noses’s men were in, Samuel Whitaker lay dying in the second-floor, and it was feared that the bed would be moved away from under him. Mrs. Whitaker ever afterwards remembered, and often spoke of that awful night when he rose up after a long fit of delirium and insensibility, and calling her to him, asked her forgiveness and that of his child.

“God bless you, Martha !” he said, squeezing her hand. “You’ve been,” he hesitated here a moment, and then as recollections of many loveless years came back to him,—“a good wife to me,” he added. She had at any rate kept shop and made puddings, and mended stockings ; managed his household affairs generally—shared his joys and sorrows, making the most of the last, as many other wives had done before her. “God bless you and our little girl ! Where’s William ?”

William was waiting without, the family Bible under his arm. He came in now and prepared to read, but Sam stopped him.

“I’ve only a few minutes left. When I’m gone you’ll take care of your poor aunt, won’t you ? And the little girl —you’ll be kind to her ? You *will* be kind ?”

He was silent then for a little while, and William, seating himself by his side, opened the book. Presently Mrs. Whitaker saw his lips moving. She thought he was repeating the words, and bent down to listen.

"I wish the poor boy was here," he said. "We were very rough with him."

That creature's son was uppermost in his thoughts. Mrs. Whitaker raised her head in anger. After a moment or two of quietude, he began to mutter again.

"If I'd gone in for the little Boddlethorpe Junction I should have made a good thing of it."

Five minutes after he was dead.

Noses's men down below stole out upon the landing, attracted by the sounds of weeping up stairs. Then came back to their pipes again—supposed "the old 'un was gone," and in deference to the departed, cracked their jokes in a lower key.

After the burial, a hearthrug dangled from the balcony in lieu of hatchment, and a certain popular authority, on whom the mantle of the great Robins is said to have descended, described the household goods in glowing language, though it is to be regretted they fetched but a small price, for all his eloquence.

Thus then it came to pass that the relict of Samuel Whitaker, stage carpenter, took a corner house in Straggleton New Town, and displaying the wreck of her furniture to the best advantage in the little rooms, took her seat behind the wire blind in the parlour, and went on with her needlework. This needlework was, seemingly, an everlasting bout of stocking-mending — a species of industry she had been famous for in the Stonywold days ; for there would seem to be women born to mend stockings as there are men born to break hearts.

A little income had happily been preserved to the widow and daughter when Sam's ship went down in a gale off Capel Court, and on this the two women hoped to be able to live. As, however, their life on such limited means must have been a very hard one, they also entertained hopes of finding a lodger for their first floor. They therefore planted a card of "apartments furnished" in a shop window in the neighbourhood, and went to bed sanguine of the result.

But this little venture did not prove immediately successful. Mrs. Whitaker pursued her stocking-mending without interruption, while Ann gazed listlessly out upon the marigolds, and through the railings into the street beyond ; and they waited in vain.

They did not think that it would be respectable to hang up a card in their own window ; and even if they had done so, it was doubtful whether many lodging-seekers would have seen it. The nameless street took its rise in a wilderness of half-built houses and terminated in a brickfield. At present, it was not quite—as it appeared on the architect's plan—a leading thoroughfare. The occasional traveller, who lost himself in those parts, seemed more bent on making the best of his way out again than upon settling down into a permanent resident.

Thus the days grew into weeks and the weeks into months, and yet the card lay in the window at the post office, and in course of time fell over on to its face.





CHAPTER II.

NE day, an extraordinary natural phenomenon was observable in Mrs. Whitaker's nameless street. This was neither more nor less than a stranger, who, as Mrs. Whitaker put it, was evidently "on the look out."

He was not a sauntering stranger—a mere passer-by or perplexed wanderer, lost among the Straggletonian intricacies,—but a person with a settled intention, who came slowly and deliberately down the road, eyeing the houses on either side, as though in search of a habitation where he could take up his abode. Perhaps there was some degree of fancifulness in the view the good lady took of the stranger's movements; but she had a sort of presentiment that such was the case from the first moment she set eyes on him.

"If he isn't looking for apartments!" she cried out, abandoning her stocking-mending in the middle of a stitch.
"I never."

And then a great idea occurred to her—a stratagem worthy of the first or third Napoleon. There was an extra card of "Apartments, furnished," carefully hidden away behind the chimney-glass, and catching this up suddenly she held it up against the window, carefully concealing her hand as she did so.

The stranger stopped. He evidently read what was on the card with great attention. He seemed half to make up his mind, then he wavered and—walked on again.

Mrs. Whitaker, with a blank countenance, watched him down the street, and saw him at last turn a corner and disappear from her view.

For ever? No! read on.

The Frank Pickering who had taken the post office was, of course, the old original Frank Pickering who was to have married Evelina. In his window, after renewing his acquaintance, Mrs. Whitaker had placed the card before alluded to, and he had promised he would try and find her a lodger. Had he not had many other things to think of, it is probable that he would have given the affair a little more of his attention.

At any rate the card remained where it had been placed, in a conspicuous position, and was found to be an object of attraction to the flies. Here it rested among the surprisingly cheap packets of stationery, and Frank Pickering's brain meanwhile hatched gigantic schemes while he stood with folded arms contemplating his extensive stock, pending a rush on the part of the public.

Whilst he was thus engaged one day, a sunburnt stranger came to a halt in front of the shop, and looked up at the name painted in a bold black letter above the window. Then the stranger looked in at Frank from between the packets of stationery, and at length making up his mind that what he was in search of was there to be found, entered and approached the counter.

"Mr. Pickering?"

With a sudden change from cordial welcome to cautious reticence, for he at first supposed that the stranger was a commercial traveller, or some one calling about an account, Mr. Pickering replied "That's my name."

"You used to live at Holloway some years ago, and were once a clerk at Hankershanks's; isn't it so?"

With increased caution, making sure this time that an attempt was going to be made to impose upon him. "Well—and why?"

"Nothing, but that I am glad to see you again after so long." And the stranger obtained possession of Mr. Pickering's hand with some difficulty, and shook it over the counter.

"I'm pretty well, thank you," said Mr. Pickering, replying to no particular enquiry; "I hope you're well; but I'm sure I don't know who you are."

The stranger playfully stepped back, and placed his arms a-kimbo.

"Look at me again," he said.

"I've no idea," replied Pickering, coldly.

"Don't you remember a little miserable sallow-faced fellow you used to take home with you, and give supper to in the back parlour behind the shop? Why, I'm the boy who went in your place to Jamaica."

"Oh! are you?" said Frank without emotion.

"Yes; only I've grown-up since. And how is your mother? Alive and well still, I hope? And—and Evelina; you don't mind my calling her so, do you? You're married, of course, long ago?"

"My mother's somewhere up stairs. She's a good deal aged. That other affair did not come off at all."

James Jarman looked a little blank. Pickering began tying up a parcel.

"I'm sorry for that," said Jarman, after a pause.

Pickering looked up sharply.

"Sorry for what? I'm not sorry, I can tell you Mr. ——. I'm very glad of it."

"Oh!"

"Yes, I am. What's the good of a sick wife to a rising man? I didn't want anything to drag me back. I have my way to make, and I mean to make it."

Here he was more vigorous still with the parcel.

"Yes, to be sure."

"That's my intention, Mr. ——, or I'll know why. I was very sorry for the girl, but it wouldn't do."

"No; to be sure."

Pickering had finished his parcel and looked up.

"No, Mr. ——"

"Jarman," said the other. "Have you forgotten?"

"For the moment. I have so much to think of. The calls of business—the post office—the pianos. Here's my circular; you may know some one who wants something in this way."

"Thank you,—yes, perhaps."

Pickering was busy now with the shelves, with his back turned to his old friend. When he turned again he seemed somewhat surprised and vexed to find that the other had taken a seat. He was all at once desperately busy himself, but he found time to ask a question.

"By-the-way, you never did go to Jamaica, if I remember rightly. You were wrecked, or something?"

"Yes, I was wrecked, or something."

"Ah, I mean," said Frank, with a slight blush, "you know what I mean : we've been so long apart, —I have been so much occupied."

"Did you ever get the letters I wrote?"

"I got some," said Frank ; "I answered."

"I got one letter," said Jarman.

"One! I thought I wrote more. I meant to, anyhow ; but what with one thing and another taking up all my time, you know, as a man of the world, how one means to do things, and keeps putting it off."

"I don't think I am much of a man of the world yet, though I've seen a good deal of the world since I saw you last. And you, with all these affairs, I suppose you are quite rich ?"

"I didn't say that," retorted Frank ; "I've made a bit of money now and again. One is not always lucky. I don't complain ; I shall pull it off yet. I don't want anyone's help or sympathy. I'm quite capable of fighting my own battles. You know I used to be in the old days."

"I think you are a good deal changed," said Jarman.

"I dare say ; I hope for the better. *You* used to be a poor sickly, moping sort of chap. You've been travelling a good deal, have you ? Rolling stones, eh ?"

Frank took a longer look than he had done hitherto at his visitor. Was he poorly off ? He was very plainly dressed, somewhat shabbily. He had evidently come there to get what he could.

"He won't get much out of me," Pickering thought to himself ; "this sort of thing must not be encouraged."

Then he added aloud—

"I've not much faith in wandering ; it's best to stop at home and work, that's what I've always found."

"If you stop at home and work long enough."

"Eh ? yes, of course ; and what are you doing,—are you in any employment, or seeking any ?"

"I'm not seeking any."

"Got into something ; that's right. Stick to it, is my advice, and give up travelling. There's not one in a thousand makes a good thing out of emigration."

James Jarman smiled very quietly.

"I've no employment," he said, "at present ; I'm not looking for any."

"Of course you know your own affairs best," said

Pickering. "It's as wel' not to get into a lazy way when one has to buckle to afterwards and work hard."

"I don't know that I shall have to buckle to ; I've made money enough."

Frank Pickering looked at him harder than before, then laughed somewhat contemptuously.

"Of course, when a man has no ambition. I couldn't bear to settle down myself, to go huggermuggering on on a pound a week. I must be doing."

"I've no ambition myself," said James Jarman, in the same quiet tone ; "but I've got a few hundreds lying idle at my banker's, and if you come across any safe investment I wouldn't mind going into it ; or I might find a little more, perhaps, if you have any likely spec you want to start."

Mr. Pickering's mouth opened very wide. Half an hour later, when Jarman left the shop, its proprietor opened the door for him and bowed him out; and the reason why Frank did not offer to shake hands at parting, was because he was afraid the other might think he was making himself rather too free.





CHAPTER III.

ABOUT a couple of hours after Mrs. Whitaker had given up all hope of ever again setting eyes on that meditative passer by, who she had fairly thought was in search of a first floor; and when she had put away the card again, and sat down in low spirits to her tea, there came a ring at the visitors' bell.

A ring at the bell has, as the reader may probably have observed, much the same effect upon some households, as the appearance of a fox's head might be supposed to produce in a well-regulated hen-roost. There was, when this ring came, so violent a scampering and shuffling within, accompanied by angry altercation carried on in loud whispers, and such a flushed and breathless appearance about the handmaiden who after a long interval opened the door, the arrival must have felt pretty sure that visitors were a rarity in Mrs. Whitaker's establishment.

The servant-girl, having had to wash her face and change her frock (which latter Mrs. Whitaker herself had hooked-and-eyed with a vengeance), was out of breath when she reached the door, and without waiting for the visitor to ask any question, blurted out—

“Do you want to see the apartments?”

The visitor, who stood staring at her somewhat vaguely, seemed thankful for the suggestion, and replied that he did want to do so; and then Mrs. Whitaker, in a cap of many rustling ribbons, burst out upon him from the parlour, and bobbed a courtesy.

Would he walk up stairs? He would, and followed in a

dreamy way. He looked round carelessly, and expressed himself satisfied.

"They're nice rooms," Mrs. Whitaker said. "You'll find them nice and comfortable. That's a nice easy chair."

"Very easy," said the lodger that was to be. Mrs. Whitaker looked at him sharply, thinking that he had spoken ironically, for it was a brute of a chair, coming of a stiff-backed generation, and monstrously hard in the seat.

But he meant no guile, and agreed to the terms so readily, the good lady could not help regretting she had not asked a third more.

"I shall not give you much trouble," the stranger said; "I live quietly."

"It's nice and quiet," said Mrs. Whitaker, who had already spoken of the locality as "nice and airy," and "nice and handy," as occasion required.

"It's almost like the country," the gentleman continued.

"Oh, quite so," responded Mrs. Whitaker; "quite fields." And she waved her hand vaguely to the place where the bricks were made, and some acres of swamp beyond, which was a preserve for tadpoles and efts, bottled off by the youthful piscatory population during the season.

"I shall bring my luggage to-night, if agreeable. I have just come—from the country, and have few friends in town. If, instead of giving references, I could pay, say a month in advance?"

He produced his purse while speaking, and Mrs. Whitaker replied graciously—

"Of course, Sir, it is always customary to have references."

"Well, in that case, I am afraid—" "

"But with you," Mrs. Whitaker hastened to add, "I can see that I have to deal with a gentleman, and so, of course —"

"Very well, then. I find, though, I have no more loose gold than I shall want. I'll pay to-night when I bring the boxes."

Mrs. Whitaker's countenance fell.

"If, for the sake of clenching the bargain, Sir, as they say—" "

"I am afraid I can't; but I will return in three hours' time at the most, and then we will settle."

She was obliged to agree to these terms, but was not nearly so hopeful as she had been a few minutes before, and

she followed him slowly down stairs. On the threshold she stopped him.

"If you would leave your card, Sir?"

"I have none with me, but my name is Smith."

He went away with this, and Mrs. Whitaker returned to the parlour, where Ann, in great anxiety, had waited to hear what had taken place.

"Well, what is he like?"

"I don't know what he is like," said Mrs. Whitaker, leaning back in her chair. "He's very dark. He's very strange. He's very quiet. I don't think he is all he seems. He says his name is Smith."

"That is because it is his name, I suppose, mamma. Don't you think so?"

"I don't know."

"But it's not unusual."

All at once Mrs. Whitaker cried out, "Ann!"

"Yes, mamma."

"Supposing?"

"Supposing what, mamma?"

"Supposing he never comes back again?"

He did come back, however. He brought his luggage on the top of a cab, riding inside himself. There were several boxes, some of which were carried up stairs, but one, the largest, was left in the passage for the present, to be put away in a store-room on the ground floor. While mamma was up stairs settling with the new lodger, Ann made an examination of this box, which was of a surprising foreign manufacture, and bore several labels whereon were printed outlandish foreign names.

On the lid, however, was pasted a piece of paper on which was written in English, "Mr. Smith, passenger to London;" and as Ann had nothing else to do, she sat on the box-lid and studied the handwriting of this direction, which was somewhat singular in character. Something about the piece of paper was, however, even more curious than the writing on it. She held a candle in her hand, and upon making a closer examination saw that the other side of the paper had some printed words on it, and that two of the words were "Frank Pickering."

When Mrs. Whitaker came down stairs again she was in

a high state of excitement, and her cap-ribbons rustled unusually.

"Whatever he may be," she said, "he is well off. Here is the first month in advance—four pound four. I said guineas when we spoke of the terms the second time, and he never made the least murmur."

This masterly stroke—for the sum originally asked had been pounds—put the good lady into capital spirits, and she prattled gaily over the supper table.

"I don't at all dislike that Mr. Smith, now I've seen a little more of him," she said; "but Ann, tell me, when first you saw him, whom did he remind you of?"

Ann said that she had not seen him very distinctly, indeed had only caught a momentary glimpse of him through a chink of the door; and then she told her mother what a strange discovery she had made, and both ladies agreed that it was very singular. Whilst they were still discussing the circumstance the up stairs bell rang.

The servant went up to see what was wanted, and came down to say that the gentleman's chimney was "smoking dreadful."

"Ask Mr. Smith if he will kindly step down here while the fire burns up. It is only because the chimney is damp."

"Oh, mamma, don't do that!" said Ann, rising in a flutter, and she ran away to make some alteration in her toilet; but something detained her on the way, and as the lodger responded very briskly to the invitation, they met in the passage and stared at one another. She saw a dark young man, looking much older than he really was, rather below the middle height, with a sad and somewhat heavy face, which yet was not ill-looking, and with a black moustache and beard.

He saw a slender girl with wistful eyes; by no means a beautiful girl—not even pretty, according to received notions of prettiness; but with a face and figure to look back at, from preference, had you seen them first among a crowd of undoubted beauties. He noted this much all in a moment, and then he had entered the parlour, and she had run up stairs.

"I don't know how to apologise about the fire," Mrs. Whitaker began, "but as soon as the chimney gets warm

"Oh, it does not matter," he answered, seating himself

as he spoke. "Was that your daughter I met in the passage?"

"Yes, Sir. You must excuse her. Girl-like, she ran away—"

"When she heard me coming?" Mr. Smith smiled at this. There seemed something in the thought that pleased him. "I beg your pardon, but you are a widow, I understood."

Mrs. Whitaker was a widow, she replied; and with little persuasion told her simple story; dug up again the departed carpenter, killed him slowly, and laid him out afresh, with the utmost accuracy as to dates; expatiating upon the particulars of the melancholy event with that relish which almost all women seem to feel for such disagreeable subjects.

The lodger listened very patiently, only turning his head now and then, when he fancied he heard a footstep on the stairs, and when at last the door opened, sprang eagerly to his feet. But it was not Ann returned. It was instead the servant, who came to say that the fire was now burning beautifully, so the lodger rose and returned somewhat reluctantly to his own apartment. He saw no more of Ann that night.

"Why didn't you come down while Mr. Smith was here?" asked her mamma, impatiently. "I never knew such a strange girl as you are, Ann. Never!"

She was a strange girl.





CHAPTER IV

ET may be remarked that it is a peculiarity of the heroes of fiction, that they entertain remarkable ideas with regard to their beds. At the termination of one of those surprisingly eventful days of theirs, they, it would appear as a general rule, will be found to throw themselves upon their couches, seemingly caring little whether they tumble the sheets or dirty the counterpane; for evidently the romance writers think it would be lowering a hero's dignity to tell us that he took off his boots.

The heroines, as become persons of a gentler sex, seldom throw themselves about; but they do not go to bed like the writer and readers of this matter of fact narrative. They are rather given to "seeking" their couch, and usually that couch is sleepless. Alas! there are many of our poor brothers and sisters in real life in whose humble homes the bed occupies too prominent a position to require to be looked for. Indeed, the chief difficulty is to avoid tumbling over it at all seasons.

Our fair young friend, Ann Whitaker, could never have been intended for a heroine, for she undressed very carefully, spending a long time over her back hair and a troublesome knot in her petticoat string; taking off her garments one by one, and not even missing her stockings. Then she put on a plain nightgown, high in the neck and long in the sleeves, and then, to crown all, a nightcap.

It is pretty generally the custom of females of the middle-class to wear this unsightly head-gear, few but the very high and very low sleeping bareheaded; and it would seem that

they do not adopt these caps as a safeguard against cold, but because they keep the hair tidy and the pillow case clean. The most popular sort of nightcap, and that which doubtless adorns the head of the beloved one who shall be nameless, is not that coquettish, flyaway, lace-edged frivolity one sees in the French lithographs ; but a something wrought out of plain muslin, that fits tightly, fastening under the chin with a string, and giving to the back part of the beauteous wearer's head the appearance of the end of a sausage.

The knowledge of the behind-the-scenes part of the beloved one's lives repays us not for the time spent in learning it. Better shut our eyes upon its little shifts and contrivances, and wait until she comes upon us in all her glory—properly made up—and dazzles us with a blaze of charms and graces.

When Ann had put on her nightcap and said her prayers, she got into bed, and read for an hour. It was a most interesting story that engrossed her attention, published in a penny miscellany, and full of the love affairs of the handsomest creatures with whiskers, and the loveliest beings in petticoats imaginable; all possessing boundless riches, all born peers and peeresses, and all expressing themselves in the finest and longest words, although their grammar was at times indifferent.

If the truth must be told, the young lady was not so nicely critical as the fair readers of this story, and, sad to relate, saw nothing very ridiculous in the stilted balderdash of the Honourable Algernon (the readers of the miscellany, for the most part, called it HHonouble HHalgeron) and beauteous Lady Beatrix. Every woman's forte is not humour, and some—it is said—even among the young, rich, and beautiful, have but a faint appreciation of waggishness, and that only in its elementary branches. It has often been a consoling thought of the writer that he was born to shine, as the reader will perceive, more as a sentimental and romantic novelist than as a mere wag.

Thus then Ann, unconscious of absurdity, read her story-book, and whimpered over the touching sorrows of the titled heroine—dear, tender-hearted little thing. There are hard, yet beautiful eyes which, reading this story, shall have no tears in them.

When she had reached the conclusion of that week's portion (it was published in "The Back Parlour, a Weekly

Emporium of Fiction, Fashion, and Family Economy") she left the Lady Beatrix upon a barren moor, in the clutches of the lawless earl, from whose violence, should the author and Providence not send the Honourable Algernon to the rescue, she might suffer, who knows what monstrous indignities. And being but a young novel reader, how could Ann be sure that Algernon would come, as of course he did, at the very nick of time, and in the middle of the first column of next week's portion?

Not having next week's number, however, Ann was obliged to go to sleep in fearful doubt as to the result. But first she lay awake awhile and thought. She thought what she would have done had she been the Lady Beatrix, and placed in similar circumstances. Then she thought what she would do if she had the Lady Beatrix's wealth and position. What she would do if an Honourable Algernon were to marry her. What she would wear. What she would say.

She pictured herself at some imposing ceremony in magnificent apparel, addressing haughty speeches to awe-struck inferiors. She pictured all this, and besides, a host of other nonsense, which could not possibly come true, for this Ann Whitaker was an incorrigible dreamer, whose whole life was a long dream, though she knew well enough what she must presently awake to. Well, let her dream on awhile. She is not quite twenty yet. There are still a few months of romance left to her, and then comes stern reality, the plain English of which is William Bradshaw.





CHAPTER V

HAT person up stairs, that first-floor lodger, was every bit as big a dreamer as Miss Ann. Also was he an impostor, who had taken Mrs. Whitaker's apartments under false pretences. That fellow's name was no more Smith than it was Jones or Johnson. Read, and judge for yourselves.

Next morning it rained heavily, and Ann, as was her wont, when not reading her *Back Parlour* or Parlour Library literature, looked out of window upon the stagnant dreariness of the nameless street. A desperately dreary look-out was this, conducive to gloom, despondency, and despair. There never was a back street with less life in it. When the great excitement of the tradesmen calling for orders was exhausted, there came a period of utter stagnation, often unbroken for several hours.

Street hawkers, after glancing disparagingly in at the corner of the road, would pass on, thinking it a waste of time and energy to try the two or three houses that were inhabited. Such of the male population as had employment went to the City at an early hour, and the womankind left behind rarely showed any signs of life. At the tidiest houses a servant would come out and clean the door step. Now and then a little drab of a girl would sally forth on a suspicious errand with a black bottle. A hand would appear at a window pulling up or down a blind, and that was all. As a general rule, the neighbours might all have been dead and laid out, waiting interment, for what the patient watcher at Mrs. Whitaker's parlour window knew to the contrary.

But strange to say, though so indefatigable at her post, Ann took but little note of the doings of her neighbours. More often her eyes were fixed upon the scanty patches of verdure to be found on a waste track yet untouched by the builder—on a hedge and a few stunted trees which hid a portion of the adjoining brick-field from sight. Far away beyond all this in that direction—much too far for her eyesight, though—were blue hills and the open sea.

Foreign climes—new and strange scenes—another language—other customs. Some women there perhaps led wild and adventurous lives—did great deeds, fought good fights, and nobly won. There must be such things, surely, in reality as well as in tale books ! All the world could not be the poor, mean world she had known. There must be greater things to live for than meal-time and bed-time.

"Good gracious me, Ann, do come away from that window," Mrs. Whitaker cried, impatiently. "You must know every one in the street by heart by this time. Why don't you sit down, and do something?"

"Do what, mamma?"

"Do anything—needlework,—reading."

"I've nothing to read."

"You've not read half those beautiful sermons William brought you last Sunday."

"I shall have to read sermons, I suppose, when I marry William."

"When you marry William ! What a way to talk."

"I'm going to marry William, am not I, mamma?"

"Of course you are. That's understood, and settled long ago, I believe. Isn't it?"

"Yes ; it was understood, and settled long ago."

"Well, then ? There ! I've no patience. Get your needlework."

"Very well, mamma. But what's the good of it ?"

There was, it must be owned, a great quantity of needle-work done beneath Mrs. Whitaker's roof, besides the elaborate botching up of dilapidated stockings, which was, strictly speaking, little better than waste of time. Patch-work counterpanes of savage ugliness, kettle-holders of unsightly patterns, and a whole chest of drawers full of misapplied industry in the way of wrappers and covers to protect other materials of lesser value.

"Oh, mamma," said Ann, laying down her work, after a few stitches set very widely apart, "why are we so poor?"

"If your father had only left well alone, we shouldn't have been so; but if I told him once, I told him a hundred times——"

"You've told me several times, mamma. But I don't mean that. I mean, why should it have been our fate to lose our money? Why should some lead such wretched lives, and the lives of others be but one long dream of pleasure? Why is the world's happiness so unfairly divided?"

"I've no idea," said Mrs. Whitaker; "but I shall have to unpick every morsel you're doing, if you take such long stitches."

What women are understood? Scarcely one, according to her own account. What do we know of the hearts we fondly suppose are our own? Our own! Why, that narrow hearthrug, which divides us, covers in reality a terrible gulf, wide and deep, in which the bones of dead loves lie bleaching. How many of them? and we, in our smirking self-sufficiency, never dreaming there was a single bone.

Ann sighed a little impatiently, and then concentrating her attention upon the sofa-cover in hand, worked more neatly. But in a while the action of her needle grew slower and slower. Then her hands fell listless in her lap, and she fixed her eyes thoughtfully upon her mother's face. The good soul was at full stitch.

What did she see? A thin little old woman, very gray and faded—with no trace of that old prettiness remaining which years ago captivated a young stage carpenter of the name of Samuel Whitaker. Here was a game of life played out. Youth—love—hope—all buried, and nothing left but a withered old lady mending stockings. All recollections of the old romance, if there had ever been a romance, forgotten, and the aim and object of life reduced to a series of mean and petty struggles—two-penny-halfpenny ambitions—paltry triumphs and tyrannies over the servant-girl, the butcher, or the baker. Breakfast—dinner—tea—supper—bed—sleep—death—churchyard—oblivion; and there might never have been a Mrs. Whitaker at all! Half a century hence, who was to say there ever had been?

Was this fate to be hers also? Why not? What was she likely to do to cause her name to live longer in the re-

collection of those who outlived her? And if by chance anyhow she could become famous, what then when she lay dead? Perhaps it were better to die out and be forgotten, than have our memory honoured but for a brief span, until the fashion changing, the idol grows old-fashioned with the change—grows in the end to be ridiculous, absurd—a nickname in the mouths of the rising geniuses of the new school.

Oh, what a weary life it was! What a hard fate! That fleeting glimpse of opulence and gentility made this mean existence succeeding bitterly hard. She could never bear to recall the past—to speak of it. Yet her mother did not seem to view things in this light. She was ever ready, when a listener was forthcoming, with the records of the fine doings of those five years of grandeur. To this day, as we know, were treasured tenderly the cards of the visitors who had called in Porticolo Square; and at intervals she would take them from the basket, dust them carefully, and replace them with a nice consideration for their owners' social status.

The old lady made the acquaintance of the other old lady at the post office, whom as yet she only knew “by hearsay,” and visiting her in a cap of state, unfolded threadbare odds and ends of departed grandeur, and related at unreasonable length the famous chronicles. The other old lady, who had grown to be “a little hard of hearing” and a little stupid, listened very patiently to what she could catch of this splendid narrative, and sometimes took a short nap whilst Mrs. Whitaker in all good faith went on with her story.

When old Mrs. Pickering talked herself, it was of what was going to be—of Frank and his stupendous projects. She had every faith in Frank, in spite of his not having made much progress hitherto; and felt it not at all unreasonable, though perhaps a little hard, that he should now and then lose patience with her on account of her slowness and old-fashioned ways.

Sometimes the two old ladies would talk against one another, and then they once or twice came to high words. As usual, Mrs. Pickering was upon the old subject, when her Frank did so and so—Ah, wait awhile until her Frank did such and such a thing. Then would be seen what would be seen.

But the anticipation of this magnificent state of affairs,

aggrieved the other old lady. Whatever Frank might do would be very well in its way, no doubt, but what would be his success to the splendours of Porticolo Square ! Those were times, if you like. There was luxurious ease, wealth, elegance, style ! Sometimes as many as two knights at one dinner table, and she who spoke, in blue satin, handed down stairs by one of them !

Then Mrs. Pickering bristled up, and chafed impatiently under the narration of these time-honoured stories.

“It’s a pity you couldn’t keep your money, my dear, when you had got it.”

“You will be more fortunate, I trust, my dear, if Mr. Frank’s speculations turn out as well as you suppose. Let us hope they will.”

“My Frank is a man of business.”

“I think he is a very good tradesman.”

“At any rate it’s a legitimate trade, which is more than can be said for scene-shifting.”

“Whom do you call a scene-shifter, Ma’am? I’d have you to know——”

But there is no occasion to inflict the remainder of this dialogue upon the reader. These little quarrels arose now and then, and Mrs. Whitaker, shaking out her feathers, as it were, would shake the dust from her shoes at she left the back parlour behind the post office, and would vow never more to return. But life was long and tiresome in Straggleton New Town, and gossip such a relief; therefore, after awhile the hatchet was once more buried and the two old women renewed their amicable relations.

Ann did not remain very long at her needlework. Her mother having left the room, she was soon back again at her favourite post — behind the parlour blind — at her favourite occupation of castle-building, and while thus engaged, she heard the lodger moving overhead. He had been hitherto almost inaudible. The servant who had been up into his room, thrice, at long intervals, stated that she had each time found him seated before the fire with a book in his hand. He wore, too, she reported, very soft slippers, in which his tread was noiseless.

“We couldn’t have got a nicer lodger”—Mrs. Whitaker said—“if he did not smoke quite so much.”

This smoking was the one bad habit yet discovered of

the new lodger. He was an inveterate smoker, and smoked a tobacco of so pungent a nature, that the servant-girl came out of the room half choked and coughed convulsively in the passage. From the appearance of some tobacco-ash on the pillow it was also to be feared that he smoked in bed.

"I must speak to him about that," said Mrs. Whitaker. "It's a great pity, too, for otherwise he is really a treasure. He complains of nothing."

It must, however, be allowed that the new lodger had received some provocation. Mrs. Whitaker and the servant had done their worst for him in the way of cookery at his supper and breakfast. There had been deeds of darkness perpetrated in the matter of fried eggs, and yet he had eaten uncomplainingly. Without a murmur he had drained the dregs of Mrs. Whitaker's terrible coffee. What was left of a broiled sole after it had stuck to and been forcibly wrenched off the gridiron, he had somehow got through, bone and all. Mrs. Whitaker had pronounced him to be a hearty eater.

Only Ann, at her post at the window, had a suspicious circumstance to relate. While she was sitting at breakfast, and the lodger was supposed to be breakfasting at the same time up stairs, she fancied she heard the drawing-room window open softly. A few minutes afterwards, looking out, she saw, standing without the garden railings, looking up very eagerly at the first-floor, a woe-begone vagabond dog, who occasionally licked his lips and whined.

It had been arranged that when he chose the lodger should dine at home, but he told Mrs. Whitaker, shortly after breakfast, that that day at least he would not require dinner to be provided. At this early period of their acquaintance Mrs. Whitaker was inclined to be more than usually gracious.

"I'm sure, Sir, if you would like anything—a little soup—Julien. A little fish—sole. A chicken to follow—roast or boiled. I could serve you up a nice little dinner."—(Here the lodger shuddered slightly). "I know how a gentleman likes to dine. You must not think, Sir, because you find us in this very humble way—Oh, no, we moved in quite a different class at one time, before Mr. Whitaker was unfortunate."

She might have added, "or fortunate;" but the old

Stonywold Court days were never alluded to in the course of the long stories the lady was so fond of telling. The lodger, however, unexpectedly exhibited a knowledge of this pre-historic period.

"So I was told. Mr. Whitaker, I think, was at the theatre."

Mrs. Whitaker blushed a little.

"Not exactly, Sir. At least, he had an appointment at one time at the Sahara."

"What line was he in?"

"What line? Oh, nothing of that sort, Sir. He was in the mechanical—the—you understand, Sir, the scenery and all that."

Who, she wondered, could have been spreading this scandal. But of course it must have been those persons at the post office.

"Mr. Pickering at the shop over there mentioned it, I suppose. He recommended you, Sir, did he not?"

"Yes—the man in the shop. He said you were a friend of his."

"I and my daughter deal there."

"That's what he meant, I dare say."

"We have no friends in this neighbourhood. After having moved in a different class, and being a little superior — But you can understand that, Sir, I am sure."

"Yes, yes, of course."

"When one has seen better days, one cannot very well bring oneself to associate with that class of persons—such as the Pickerings — and yet one does not like to be thought too proud."

She had, more than once, partaken of tea in Mrs. Pickering's parlour with much condescension and appetite.

"And it is a hard matter too, Sir, as you may suppose, to keep oneself respectable in these times, and with everything at such an enormous price. Of course, if I had hung a bill up in the window I might have let over and over again. But I could not bear to do that, and then the generality of lodgers would not have suited me."

"Pickering mentioned a son of yours, I think, who went to Jamaica, and made a good thing of it abroad. Am I right?"

"Not a son—a nephew—an ungrateful boy, who ran away and left us without even saying good-bye. But we

never heard that he had got on well. I think not. He was not very likely to do so. We have not heard from him for several years."

"He did not send and assist you, then, after Mr. Whitaker's misfortunes?"

"Not he. He may be dead for what I know to the contrary."

"Or he may not know your address, or else perhaps he would send."

"Perhaps so. I am not as young as I was, and I've not always been accustomed to scheme and stint and pinch. It's very hard, Sir."

Here the old lady took a seat and produced a pocket-handkerchief. The interview seemed to promise to be a long one, but at that moment there came a sharp double knock at the street door.

"Oh, there's my nephew William," said Mrs. Whitaker, rising hastily.

"Not the nephew who went to Jamaica?"

"Oh no, Sir. You may have heard of him, the Reverend Mr. Bradshaw, the minister there has been so much about in the papers."





CHAPTER VI.

A YOUNG man, tall and well-made, rather handsome, though perhaps a little too florid of complexion for some tastes. Wearing a suit of shiny black cloth, and a rather broad brimmed hat with a deep mourning band, and black thread gloves. Carrying a large silk umbrella infolded in one hand, a packet of loose papers in the other—tracts and pamphlets.

This was William—Billy the Bold of old times, once the pupil and *protégé* of an obscure but well-meaning person of the name of Wapshot—now himself a shining light—the proprietor of a chapel built for him by subscription by his admirers—more than that, the founder of a sect different from and improving upon all other sects in many important particulars, and having that speciality, quite its own, of being the one right belief—the disciples of which modestly designated themselves—The Chosen Few.

“How do you do, William?”

He gave her a listless hand to shake without replying, asking instead another question.

“Where’s Ann?”

“In the parlour, I think. Ann, where are you? Don’t you hear who it is? How slow you are.”

Ann, with her back turned towards the light, received her cousin in silence. They shook hands, and then all three sat down.

“Oh, such news, William,” Mrs. Whitaker went on. “We’ve let.”

“Let?”

"The drawing-rooms, you know--up stairs. Isn't that fortunate? I was afraid we should never get a lodger—but such a nice person—so quiet—gives no trouble."

"I am sorry you should be obliged to let lodgings. If you could have added to your income in a less objectionable way—less publicly."

"We never showed the card in the window," said Mrs. Whitaker, eagerly, and then of a sudden blushed crimson as she recollect ed that little ruse of hers the day before.

"Is it so disgraceful?" asked Ann with some bitterness in her tone. "Are we disgracing ourselves and you?"

"No—no—not as you are. And in this out of the way place it will most likely never be known. I must confess, however——"

"I understand, William; when we are married, of course mamma must never let anyone know we have done such a thing, or that papa was a carpenter at the theatre——"

"Ann, Ann, how can you?" broke in Mrs. Whitaker; "you know he—your cousin, objects to that subject—you know——"

"I know I wish I had gone on the stage——"

"Ann, how can you?"

William was looking very grave. "Of course Ann does not mean what she says?"

"I do mean it."

"I should not like to think that you could do so. Lodging-letting is far preferable to anything of that sort, of course. There is no comparison. Besides, there will be no necessity—is no necessity. As it is, I am very sorry indeed that these lodgings have been let."

Mrs. Whitaker threw an appealing glance towards him. "You know, William, my income is so very small. We have to be so careful of every penny. I don't think I ever ought to have thought of taking a whole house. We ought to have lived in lodgings ourselves."

"I said you ought," replied William. "That was what I advised."

"You don't suppose I took the house on my own account, William? Wasn't there Ann to be considered, and you too? Would it have been respectable for your future wife and her mother to be living in a second floor in a back street? Would you have liked that to become known?"

William rose impatiently, pulled on a glove which he had

taken off on entering the house, then moved towards the door. Mrs. Whitaker expressed astonishment.

"Are you going so soon? Are you not going to stop to tea?"

"Not to-day: I have an important engagement. I hope you will change your opinions, Ann; when you think over what you have said, you will be sorry for those hasty words."

He held out his hand as he spoke, but the girl made no response, and then he walked towards the street-door. Mrs. Whitaker followed closely.

"I beg your pardon, William, but you haven't forgot what you promised?"

"What was that?"

"About the landlord. You told me you would help me with the rent, you know, William. He will call the day after to-morrow, and I said that I would pay it."

"I will come again to-morrow, and we will talk the matter over. Of course, as you have got a lodger now your income will be larger, and we must make some other arrangements. Good-bye."

He went away with this, and Mrs. Whitaker returned to the parlour not a little excited.

"We can do without his assistance at all, for that matter, and I shall tell your Cousin William so the next time I see him. He didn't know Mr. Smith has paid in advance, and I certainly wanted the money. We both want some new dresses very badly; but no matter. I'll pay the rent with it, and Mr. William can keep *his* money to himself."

"Yes, mamma. I'm glad of that."

"I dare say you are; but it's every bit your fault that William went away angry as he did. You will always say something or other. How can you?"

"If you please, Ma'am," the servant said, "all the while you was a-talking to Mr. Bradshaw at the street-door, the gentleman in the drawing-rooms was a standing on the landing to listen. I was on the landing on the floor above, and looked over and see him."

Mrs. Whitaker blushed. It was to be hoped he had not heard what was said about the rent. He might think that they were in an insolvent state, and grow alarmed regarding the safety of his luggage. Looked at from another point of view, too, it was very unpleasant to have any person in the house playing the spy, and listening on landings.



CHAPTER VII.

NEXT day something very astonishing occurred. Ann, looking in the letter-box, found a letter lying there directed to her—a letter which bore no postmark, and had evidently been brought by hand. She wondered a little that it should be addressed to Miss instead of Mrs. Whitaker, for she supposed, of course, that it was a tradesman's circular. There were a great many circulars and handbills left at the house, containing tempting offers of astonishing bargains, and pitiful stories of impending bankruptcy, forced sales, and enormous sacrifices. The poor shopkeepers in Straggleton New Town spent a little fortune in printing these sheets in showy type, and yet but little profit resulted therefrom.

Ann took the letter to the breakfast table, and laid it aside whilst she poured out a cup of tea. Then, after drinking a little, she tore open the envelope, and examined the enclosure. They were five bank of England notes for ten pounds each.

“Oh, mamma ! oh, mamma ! oh, mamma !”

“God bless the child ! what's the matter ?”

“Look here what somebody has sent us !”

“Good gracious me !” said Mrs. Whitaker, after full five minutes' silent contemplation of the treasure.

How was this extraordinary occurrence to be accounted for? Mrs. Whitaker had an explanation.

“It is William, of course. Look at the writing.”

The writing was looked at. It was not William's.

"But it must be," urged Mrs. Whitaker. "Who else could have sent the money? Besides, he probably disguised his hand."

The question was, however, why should he have disguised his hand? Moreover, why should he send so much money? The sum he had promised to advance Ann's mamma was simply ten pounds.

But then, if William had not sent the money, who could have sent it? They knew no one. Actually, the only persons with whom they were acquainted in this time of tribulation were those Pickerings at the post office. The mention of the Pickerings gave Mrs. Whitaker an idea.

"Supposing—but no, that could not be it."

"What, mamma?"

"Supposing it should be from James?"

And the old lady related what Mr. Smith up stairs had said upon the subject, when he had seemed to hint at a rumour of Jimmy's having made a fortune in foreign parts, some of which he would have sent home had he known their address. Had he, then, found out their address? If so, from whom? From Mr. Smith, perhaps. That Mr. Smith was a mysterious person.

While they were yet discussing his mysterious qualities, Mr. Smith came down stairs and left the house. Yesterday he had been at home all day. To-day he went out at half-past nine, and he had not left word when he would return. He *was* mysterious.

Ann peeped out at him from behind one of the window curtains. His face was thin and worn and sun-burnt. His beard and hair and clothes seemed cut somewhat in foreign fashion. Perhaps he had met Jimmy abroad—knew him—had been commissioned by him to discover their whereabouts. While Ann was trying to work this line of argument into some probable shape, another idea occurred to Mrs. Whitaker.

"I see it all. It is Mr. Smith himself who sent it. The man's in love with you. It's clear as the day."

"Mamma!"

"Oh yes he is, though. Now I come to think of it. The way he has talked about you—asking a hundred questions! Why should he otherwise take the room in such a hurry, and pay a month in advance? How is it he never grumbles at anything? The way that girl cooked the sole yesterday

morning was disgraceful. No. There's only one explanation. He loves you. I told him we weren't well off. I dare say he is very rich—perhaps he is a lord in disguise. Such things have often happened, Miss, I can tell you, though you may look incredulous."

"Do you remember, mamma, what I told you about the address on his box—that it was written on the back of one of Pickering's circulars? I'll go and compare the two writings."

The comparison made, it appeared there was very strong evidence in favour of the supposition that the mysterious Smith had sent the money. There was a suspicious similarity in the crossing of the t's and dotting of the i's.

"What does he mean by sending it to me?" Ann asked with flashing eyes; and Mrs. Whitaker was not prepared, at a moment's notice, to give any very reasonable explanation.

What was to be done? To begin with, perhaps it would be as well to make sure that there was some foundation for this somewhat romantic notion. And how to make one? From the Pickering, of course; and Mrs. Whitaker straightway put on her bonnet, and tied the strings with determination. Then she tore off the lodger's box as much of the address as she could get away, and with this in her hand departed on her mission.

Left alone, Ann pondered deeply, arriving, however, at but small results. A knock at the door interrupted her. It was her cousin William, who had called according to promise.

"How do you do, Ann? Is your mother at home?"

"No. She has gone round to the post office."

"She ought to have waited at home when she knew I was coming. I have so many calls on my time. It is very inconvenient."

"Can you leave the message with me, if you cannot stop? But do stop."

He was standing up, not yet having taken a seat. As usual he was loaded with a number of pamphlets, and with the silk umbrella unfastened; he also held his hat; and presently, when he wanted to use one hand to feel for his purse, he shifted the hat and papers into his other hand, and held the umbrella between his knees.

"I'll stop, if you wish me to do so, Ann," he said, somewhat clumsily. "Do you?"

But Ann made no answer—affected not to hear. He looked at her for a minute or two in silence.

“You are very pale. I hope you are not ill?”

“I am very well. It is very dull here.”

“You should go out.”

“Where to? I don’t like walking by myself.”

“I must try and steal an hour from my duties, now and then, to take you out. It was a pity your mother chose a home so far from the scene of my labours.”

“I thought it was you who suggested this neighbourhood?”

“No. I think, though, I expressed my approval. At that time I thought it best, all things considered, that our engagement should not be made generally public. You know how eager the newspapers are to pick up and make much out of every scrap of news concerning me.”

“But there is no longer any necessity to keep it a secret?”

“A secret! What an expression! I should be very glad to introduce you to some of the leading members of my flock. We must fix upon a day soon.”

They sat for a few moments in silence. Then he said, in a sort of hurt tone, “I wish you would not wear your hair dressed in that fashion. Would it not be better in plain bands?”

“I don’t know. I will alter it, if you wish me to do so.”

She answered in a weary tone, and he looked at her sharply, as though he would have read her thoughts. After chafing impatiently for a moment or two, he went on to say, “I hope you are not of the same opinion you were yesterday?”

“What about?”

“About the—the stage. But of course I knew you did not really mean what you said. Only I did not like to think that you could willingly say anything to hurt my feelings.”

“No—I was wrong. As we are to be married, I ought to study to know what pleases you and to please you.”

He did not exactly like the tone in which these words were said, and yet he did not altogether dislike the words.

“I trust you will find that I like what is right,” he went on to remark, “and dislike what is wrong.”

“Yes,” she replied, and rising abruptly went to look out of the window.

He looked after her a little uneasily, as though he were

not quite certain whether or not things were going on as satisfactorily as might be, and then, producing his purse, told out some gold upon the table.

"Will you give this to your mother, Ann, when she comes in? It is a pity she does not manage better. We must try if we cannot do so when our time comes."

He waited for a reply, but as she made none, he did not press her. It seemed to him that she no doubt felt she had been in the wrong, and was ashamed to confess her error. Well, he would not force an avowal from her. As he was strong, he must be generous. He drew on his black thread gloves, smiling as he did so. Then, having bidden her good-bye in a low tone, took his departure.

She had left the window as he glanced at it on his way past. Perhaps she was crying on the sofa. Had he been too severe with her? Should he go back? Eventually he decided he would not, more particularly as he saw in the far distance the omnibus approaching in which he wished to return to the neighbourhood of his chapel.

Ann was on the sofa; whither she had retired because she did not wish to be obliged to nod to Mr. Bradshaw, as he passed by. She was not crying, however. Only repeating to herself, "When our time comes."

The prospect of that time coming sometimes seemed, if anything, a little more dreary than the life as it now existed in Straggleton New Town. And yet why should this be? There was a good man who loved her, and had loved her many years. It seemed to her, as long as ever she could remember, to have been a settled thing that they were to be married. She had never associated the idea of marriage with any other person.

And would he not make her happy? He was very clever — very good. Sometimes she thought almost too good. Were they after all, quite matched? Could she endure the regularity, the monotony of the life awaiting her? And yet why not? What else did she expect? Marriage life was a serious thing—her mother said. "One has much to put up with, even from the best of husbands. Your poor father was sometimes very trying."

Mrs. Whitaker was a long while absent upon her mission, but she returned at last in some excitement.

"Oh, my dear!—what do you think? I've found it all out. Pickering was evidently bribed to keep the secret, but I cross questioned that stupid old woman."

"And what did she say, mamma?"

"I don't know exactly what she did say, and what she didn't say. She chatters so, there's no remembering one-half of it, but I formed my own conclusions."

"And what were they?"

"My dear, there's a secret."

"But what is the secret about?"

"That remains to be seen. I haven't found it out as yet—but I will."

This somewhat unsatisfactory termination of Mrs. Whitaker's diplomacy Ann was compelled to be satisfied with. What further evidence she wanted she must search for herself.

"When William comes we'll tell him all about it, and ask his advice," said Mrs. Whitaker. Then Ann told her mother that he had been there, and had left the ten pounds. Mrs. Whitaker gathered them up and counted them.

"I don't think I shall keep them," said the good lady, holding them very tightly in her hand while she spoke. "William is really so dictatorial, and so exacting, and asks so many questions."

"But if you do not can you pay the rent?"

"Why not? There are those fifty pounds."

"Mamma, you surely would not touch them? If it is true that that man sent them to me——"

"Well?"

But here came a rat-tat at the door, which cut the conversation short. The lodger had returned.

During the afternoon Mrs. Whitaker suggested several plans for discovering whether or not Mr. Smith had sent the notes. Their numbers were consecutive. Had he any more notes in his possession. If so, and the numbers ran on before or after these, the case was proved. But how to find this out? Easily enough, by going up and asking if he could oblige her with a ten pound note for ten sovereigns. This scheme, however, with several others as ingenious, was not put into execution, and after tea, Mrs. Whitaker took a nap, and forgot all about it.

But Ann did not. She sat with the envelope in her hand, thinking deeply. When her mamma began to nod her head

she looked over at her anxiously. And on the good lady's regular respiration betokening that she slumbered soundly, Ann rose and left the room on tiptoe. A few moments later she was tapping at Mr. Smith's door.

He was sitting by the fire in the act of lighting a pipe, and paused to call out "Come in." On the table by his side there stood a reading-lamp, which threw a bright light down upon an open book, and up in a round spot on the ceiling, but the room was so dark elsewhere it was impossible for him to recognise his visitor, and as she stood still for a moment he said, "What do you want?"

Without immediately replying, she approached the table, and paused within a yard of him. He saw then for the first time who it was, and started to his feet with a strange agitation visible upon his dark features.

Then Ann said abruptly, without another word of preface, "You addressed this envelope to me, Sir, I think,—is it not so?"

His lips moved, but he made no audible answer.

"Yes, I see you did," she went on. "Why did you do so?"

"I didn't say——"

"There was no occasion to say anything. I read it in your face. Please take these back, Sir. I dare say it was very kindly meant. My mamma and I are poor, but not so poor as that. That would insult us."

He made no attempt at denial now.

"I meant no insult, God knows. Ann—Miss Whitaker, I——"

"What do you mean?" she asked, drawing back frightened from his outstretched hand. "You are a stranger to us. Why have you come here? What is all this mystery?"

"My folly, that is all. There ought to have been none. I ought not to have sent the money in that way! When you hear whom it comes from, I hope you will not think its being sent to you an insult. Do you remember James? You used to call him Jimmy—who went to Jamaica—who was supposed to be dead——"

"Are you——?"

"Yes. What's the matter? Ann—don't do that? What's the matter?"

She had put her hand up to her head with a little cry, and burst into tears, and then laughed, and held out her hand and said awkwardly, "How do you do, James?"

James shook her hand more awkwardly still. "How do you do?" he echoed.

After a pause she asked, "Why did you not tell us at first?"

"I don't exactly know," replied James ruefully, and he didn't just at the moment. "I wish I had," he added, and he wished so from his heart.

As Ann sat very silent in a chair which he had offered her, with her hands upon her lap, he found it rather difficult to know what to say next, and yet it seemed to him he had so much to say—presently—afterwards—when he had said the first thing, whatever that might be. But he said nothing.

Ann rose at last. "Had I not better tell mamma?"

"Yes—directly. I'll go with you and tell her—in a moment. Not yet."

He had taken her hand in his.

"You don't know how I've looked forward to seeing you again. How I have longed for it. How I have feared to come back lest you might all be dead—lest you might all have forgotten me. I thought at first I would come straight to your house and knock at the door, and cry out "Here I am," but I couldn't do that because when I came to look for the house I found that the court itself had been pulled down—that the whole neighbourhood was swept away. It nearly broke my heart, that disappointment."

Her hand in his pressed it gently.

"I found out, with a great deal of trouble and a hundred enquiries, what had become of you, and learnt that you were rich. I don't know whether that did not disappoint me more almost. No it didn't. I went on with my enquiries, and I found out at last that you were poor again, and had come to live here. I would have come then as I had thought of doing at first, but I was afraid. I thought then I would adopt this silly scheme I have carried out. It *was* silly."

Her hand pressed his again, and when she spoke the tears trembled in her voice as in her eyes.

"It was not silly. You have the same noble heart you had long ago—the same we none of us understood. I—I am very happy to see you, James."

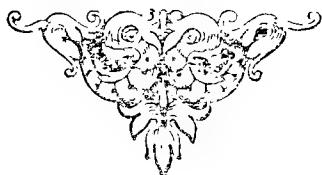
She rose, then leant forward, kissed him, and ran out of the room.

There in the fire-light he sat very motionless, except that

his heart throbbed almost audibly. His cheek was wet with her tears. Presently his tears also trickled down it.

“Good gracious! mercy me—Mr. Smith—Jimmy—where is he? Let me go to him.”

Mrs. Whitaker was coming up the stairs with the full intention of straining him to her maternal bosom.





CHAPTER VIII.

SOME really happy days succeeded the events above recorded—a period of almost unalloyed happiness in which the roses returned now and again to Ann's cheeks, and a merry laugh—not often heard hitherto—rang gaily through Mrs. Whitaker's residence.

That person of the name of Smith had disappeared for good and all, and in his place was the rich Mr. Jarman : “ My nephew James, who has been away so long in foreign parts.” The news spread among the sanguine shopkeepers of Straggleton New Town, and very soon extra circulars and handbills were thrust into the letter-box bearing Mr. Jarman’s name. “ — Jarman, Esq.”

Great expectations, it would appear, were entertained regarding — Jarman, Esq., among the commercial community of those parts. Why should he not want to deal extensively in drugs and medicines? Without doubt he must require cigars and tobacco? Why not “ try our best family congou ? ” &c. &c. Indeed there was no saying what he might not purchase, if the case were only properly put to him in appropriate capitals.

He was rich, was the rich Mr. Jarman, there was no doubt about that. Wherever he had been,—Mrs. Whitaker to her dying day had never any distinct understanding of where it was,—it was evident he had been at the right place, and had done the right thing at the right time. Wherever he had been and whatever he had done, one thing was sure —he had made a lot of money.

Nor was he stingy. "No, he's not stingy. I must say that of James," Mrs. Whitaker had observed upon several occasions, and indeed it would have been difficult to point out how he could have shown greater liberality, unless it were by giving his fortune away altogether. Very soon the presence of James Jarman's money began to show itself in the little household. A silver tea-urn, which had lain in difficulties for some time past, once more decked the tea-table upon state occasions. Mrs. Whitaker appeared in a new silk gown richly ornamented by a florid sprig. Ann wore a darling little gold watch, the winding up and regulating of which was half the day's occupation during the first happy week of ownership. The servant-girl had new ribbons in her cap. Some arrears of wages were paid up, and she signalised that event by the purchase of a new pair of boots which creaked amazingly.

"You need want for nothing while I have it," James said many times. "This is not a cheerful part of the town to reside in. I must look about. I will find some pretty villa somewhere, standing in its own grounds. You shall come and live with me there, and keep house for me."

"But some day you will get married," Ann said.

"And some day Ann will get married," said Mrs. Whitaker. "And what will William say?"

What would William say, was a question which sometimes came in a serious moment to both the ladies. What would William say when he heard what wonderful things had come to pass, and were to come to pass? How was it he did not know already? The reason of his ignorance was this.

There had been a sort of religious festival down in the midland counties. The celebrated Mr. Bradshaw had been invited thither, and his eloquence had created a profound sensation. He had started upon this journey the day after that on which he brought Mrs. Whitaker the ten pounds for her rent, and his return had been delayed from day to day. He had now been absent nearly a fortnight.

Among the various improvements in Mrs. Whitaker's house was the introduction of a piano, which Ann played—not very well, but enough to accompany herself in some little songs she sang of an evening in a low sweet voice, that James found very delightful to listen to. At his desire very often the lighting of the lamp was delayed after tea, and he and Mrs. Whitaker sat in the fire-light listening to

these same songs, and generally the soothing influence of the music and the fire upon the top of the hot tea and tea-cake, coaxed the good lady off to sleep.

James, sitting back in the darkest corner he could find, was not asleep, although he was very silent. The recollection of the old, cruel childhood came back to him then, and he thought how he had striven and worked and done his best ever to be disappointed. After all, though, what did it matter? He had been lucky. He had found riches. He was happy now—for a little while at any rate. How long would it last?

When the lamp was lit they usually had a game of cards—whist with a dummy and sixpenny points, at which Mrs. Whitaker generally won from eighteen-pence to five-shillings, and pronounced her lucky evenings to be most improving. James was a bad player; he revoked, and forgot to score—he never knew whose lead it was—he never gave his partner a chance—he never knew what cards were out—when it was his lead, he invariably kept the table waiting; sometimes he would be found with his cards unsorted after two or three tricks had been played.

“Why ever don’t you pay attention?” Mrs. Whitaker would say. “See there!—what on earth made you do that? You ought to have played spades. Don’t you see you have trumped your partner’s trick? Why, bless the man, there never was such silly play!”

“I’m a poor bungler, I’m afraid,” said James, laughing; “I never could play at games. Don’t you remember, Ann, the old hop-scotch days? Do you recollect when you broke the window, and I would not say who did it?”

“Good gracious, James, don’t talk about those things! You surely never played at such a low game, Ann. I can’t believe it.”

“Oh yes, I did, mamma,” said Ann, wickedly; “I could play at it now.”

“Ann!” cried Mrs. Whitaker, severely; “never let me hear you say such a thing again. If William were to hear you!”

“By-the-way,” said James, “does our Cousin William approve of cards?”

Mrs. Whitaker knew very well he didn’t. She was a dreadfully deceitful old woman about some things; almost all woman are deceitful about *some things*. “I’m not quite

sure what William's opinion is upon the subject. I don't think we have ever played cards when he has been here,—have we?"

"You know we haven't, mamma;" and Mrs. Whitaker blushed as deeply as the poppy in her cap.

"If we hear his knock," said James, "we'll hide the cards under the table."

This was not the only occasion on which that fellow James endeavoured in a quiet way to inculpate the two ladies, as it were, in his dark conspiracies. The notion of William's knocking made their hearts beat just a little quicker. Many times they said to themselves—

"What would William say supposing he were to come now,—whatever would William say?"

To begin with, would William approve of the piano? He had told Ann that when they were married, he would give her a beautiful harmonium. It is not usual to play secular tunes on those instruments; it was then reasonable to suppose that the harmonium was to be devoted to hymns; but it was not hymns that Ann sang so charmingly.

Ann arranged her hair in a pretty style of her own; James had praised a stray ringlet which formed part of its somewhat elaborate construction; and Ann wore this curl in fear and trembling, intending to tuck it up and fasten it with a hair-pin to the other mass the moment she heard William's knock at the door.

Mrs. Whitaker, too, had her doubts about the florid-sprig ornamentation. The servant girl knew very well that Mr. Bradshaw would disapprove of the colour of her cap ribbons. But all these minor peccadilloes sank into insignificance before the great wrong-doing to come.

One day James said, quite calmly and coolly—

"Suppose we go to the play?"



CHAPTER IX.

“**H**E play!” echoed Mrs. Whitaker.
“The play!” echoed Ann.
Then they both thought of William, and were silent. Decidedly William would not approve of the play. What a long while it was since they had been anywhere. How delightful it would be, but how angry William would be afterwards. No, it was quite impossible.

But a ray of hope broke in upon their disappointment.
“A nice sort of fellow I made acquaintance with the other day gave me some tickets,” said James. “It’s not exactly for the regular play, you know; it’s for an amateur performance at an amateur theatre.”

“Ah!” cried Mrs. Whitaker, “that makes a difference, doesn’t it?”

It made a very great difference; all the difference, as everybody agreed, when the question was fully discussed. Amateur theatricals could not be as objectionable as real theatricals, and plays in a room not nearly so wicked as plays in a playhouse. It was quite probable that if the matter were put to William, he would really not make any objection. Then it was impossible to put it to him, as he was away in the country. After all, there could be no great harm in his knowing about it, as clearly they were all agreed that there was no harm in the act itself.

In the middle of the important discussion what should come but a postman’s knock; and whom should the letter be from which he brought but William Bradshaw himself,

saying that he would be absent for another week at least. Under these circumstances what could they do but go to the amateur performance?

They went.

It was an evening of great excitement. The ladies began to dress in broad daylight, and were some hours engaged upon their toilets. As regarded Mrs. Whitaker, imposing results accrued from these lengthy operations—the great sprig pattern even was not grand enough for the occasion. A something of marvellous manufacture—home made—was produced, which was neither cape, tippet, pelisse, peplum, fichu, nor spencer, and yet partook of the nature of all!—a long and carefully hoarded silk of brilliant hue, which smelt strongly of the box where it had been imprisoned.

Ann looked quite pretty and was in the highest spirits. She sang softly to herself as the cab drove along, and, caught in the act when they came once unexpectedly to a standstill, blushed and laughed.

“Lor’ bless the girl,” cried Mrs. Whitaker, “how she does love a bit of pleasure!”

The old lady was herself in a state of great excitement, though she concealed her delight more artfully. There was, indeed, an unwonted sprightliness in her movements, and she bounced out of the cab, when it at length drew up in front of the door of the Boudoir Theatre, like some frisky young hoyden.

“Don’t the old gal skip neither!” was the irreverent exclamation of one of the common persons assembled at the outer portal to see the quality arrive.

The “auditorium” of the Boudoir was limited in its capabilities, and hard-seated. It smelt a good deal like a vault, and was chilly at the beginning of the evening and very hot at the end. There were some private boxes of very small dimensions, which had a stuffy flavour about them, similar to that of the interior of an omnibus on a wet day in a poor neighbourhood.

Upon this occasion the theatre had been taken by some gentlemen amateurs occupying a higher position in the social scale than that which amateurs at such a place generally enjoy, and the costumes of the audience were brighter than usual. Until the play began, then, and while the musicians in the orchestra were tuning their fiddles, the ladies were

fully occupied in criticising their neighbours, and then the fiddles being tuned, a rather jerky and jingling overture ushered in the performances.

These began with a farce which two gentlemen acted with perhaps a little more confidence in their humorous powers, than the somewhat feeble mirth of the spectators warranted. After this came a good long wait, and then the piece of the evening. A murmur of expectation had preceded it. The actor of the principal character had achieved a small reputation by his previous performances. Some young ladies in the seat before the Whitakers were quite ecstatic in their admiration.

“Have you ever seen him before?”

“Yes, at the last performance.”

“Is it not beautiful, and is he not handsome?”

“I went,” one young lady said, and even she was not the most enthusiastic, “with the Beverley girls and the two Miss Starlings, and all seven of us fell in love with him.”

This conversation was only terminated by the rising of the curtain, and then the house was hushed, and very soon the hero of the evening was swaggering before his admirers’ bright eyes. He played the part of a Spanish nobleman—profligate, ragged, penniless, but light of heart as purse. A merry cavalier, with an ever-ready sword, now drawn in defence of a dark-eyed dancing girl, now of a pert page in blue satin “trunks”—(“The bold thing!” from Mrs. Whitaker). A rollicking dare-devil fellow, as brave as he was impudent and ready-witted. Presently condemned to death, he bade the soldiers who were to shoot him join him in a parting glass, and joined them in a merry song; then swaggered out to death with a saucy laugh and a wave of his white hand. Who that wore petticoats could have helped falling in love with this dear, wicked, handsome gentleman, the great Don Cæsar de Bazan?

And who with whom this history interests itself particularly fell in love with him that night? It is not often that an author gets the chance of introducing his hero with roll of drum and flourish of trumpet, but here, gentle ladies and brave gentlemen, enters on the scene the real hero of what may prove a sadder and more tragical story than the reader wots of.

Yes, here he made his entrance into the little world of which Ann formed a part. Here he came with his ringlets,

his drooping moustache, his dark flashing eyes, his richly slashed doublet (the Don got rid of his rags, as you know, half-way through the piece). Here he came, laughing, singing, making love in a deep, tremulous voice, which thrilled through the heart of the sympathising little girl, who listened breathless.

What rubbish this must seem to a sensible person of the sterner sex—the plain, practical man of business, with an honest ugliness upon his open face ! What woman of sense would fall in love with a fool of a fellow playing the mountebank in russet boots and ruffles ? This hero is presently to play another part off the stage, and in private clothes to walk and talk like any commonplace person ; but to the end of time shall Ann still preserve an ineffaceable recollection of the dashing Don Cæsar. To the last he shall be to her Don Cæsar—the gay, heroic Don—the brave, generous, spendthrift gentleman ! Do no others play such a part in the hearts of those who love them—no mean, paltry, shallow pretenders live and die heroes, and are never known in their real characters ?

At last the curtain fell amidst great applause, and the hero was loudly called for. It was a sight to see him then cross the tiny stage—two good strides would have done it—so calmly confident of his own merits—graciously acknowledging, but by no means flustered by, the universal homage. The young ladies in front exclaimed in chorus—“Isn’t he delightful ? Isn’t he splendid ? It is better than anything at the theatre.”

Our two female friends were gazing upon him in silent admiration, and Ann’s eyes were dimmed with tears. Some one threw a bouquet, which Don Cæsar picked up gracefully and kissed. A common male person laughed jeeringly—“The idea of chucking flowers at a fellow !” But the remark was drowned in the loud acclamation.

Then some of the other characters were called for, and came eagerly, and bowed, and disappeared again ; but these were events of little interest to any but the actors themselves and their personal friends. Ann, with a long breath, leant back and closed her eyes. James’s voice aroused her. He was asking a question. What it was she had not heard.

“Did you like that ?”

“Oh, so much ! Is he as handsome off the stage ?”

“He—who—Draper ?”

"Draper?"

"The one who did the Don? Le Mercier he's called upon the bill."

"That's a prettier name than Draper."

"But it means the same thing, only it's French. He knows his own name isn't a very grand one, and so meets criticism half way by the nickname he has chosen; though, if I had been he, I should have called myself Bobbin McReel."

"Would you?" said Ann, quite seriously.

"And what's his Christian name?"

"Harry."

"That's pretty. Harry Draper! I don't think it is such an ugly name, after all."

A minute later she asked—"Do you know him?"

"Him—always meaning Draper? Yes, I know him a little. It was he who gave me the tickets. He'll come up here presently, I dare say, and I'll introduce him."

There was yet another play. Amateur performances can seldom be condemned for too great brevity. The concluding piece was the "Spitalfields' Weaver," in which a celebrated comic amateur was to take the part of Simmonds.

"We shall be very late if we stay it all out, sha'n't we?" said Mrs. Whitaker. "Dear me, how very warm and thirsty the dust does make one."

But Ann wanted to stop. "Shall we not stay to see the celebrated comic amateur?" James, too, proposed that they should go into the saloon, where all the delicacies peculiar to the saloons of theatres were procurable. Whilst they were there, Ann heard a voice behind her which she recognised.

"Oh, James——"

James turned quickly from the counter on which he had been putting down an empty glass. "What is the matter?"

"Nothing. Only—is that your friend?"

"To be sure. Hallo, Draper! How are you? Allow me to introduce you."

He was yet Don Cæsar, although in modern dress. He had lost his long ringlets, and his hair was somewhat closely cut, in a military fashion. About the drooping moustache there was no deception, however; nor about the bright, dark, searching eyes. He wore a light overcoat, and had a white

scarf tied loosely round his throat ; a cigar and a cane he carried gave him much of Don Cæsar's gay air, but he did not swagger nor ogle Ann when introduced to her.

What had Don Cæsar to say for himself in private life ? Not very much on that occasion. Mrs. Whitaker told him how pleased they had been, and he smiled very sweetly, and showed some white and regular teeth.

"How clever you must be," she said. "And how you can remember it all ! It's most astonishing."

"It went off pretty well, I think," said Don Cæsar. "I was horribly supported though. Are you going to stop for the comic man ? I can't myself,—I've an appointment. Good-bye. Good-evening."

"Now we've had something, I feel quite refreshed," said Mrs. Whitaker. "Shall we go back ?"

"No, mamma," said Ann. "What's the good ? It's very late too, I am certain. And after the other piece it can't be worth seeing."

And so they did not stop for the comic man.





CHAPTER X.

DURING William's absence in the country, the Whitakers were kept well acquainted with his sayings and doings. He wrote at great length about them himself, and they were also reported in the paper.

The "Thirsty Soul" was supplied to them every Saturday from Pickering's shop, and there were all the movements of the Chosen Few fully set forth, with encouraging comments, for this was the special organ of the Chosen, and pealed forth their praises loudly. It appeared, from this journal's statements, that the new doctrine was rapidly gaining ground—that the Few promised before long to become many—that the truth would assert itself in spite of all opposition—that might would soon be joined to right, and a great and glorious triumph ensue.

All this while there were, however, many thousands upon thousands of Catholics, Protestants, High Church, Low Church, Middle Church, Methodists, Wesleyans, Independents, Baptists, Anti-baptists, Moravians, Presbyterians, Quakers, Shakers, Mormons, Pagans, Jews, and Peculiar People, besides other sorts too numerous to mention, who were going on in blind ignorance of the Chosen Few and their doctrines. It seemed quite likely that some of these outsiders would go down to their graves ignoring the right path as previous generations had done without number, and the Chosen loudly bewailed the inevitable doom of such, and held monster meetings to take their sad case into consideration.

At these meetings the celebrated Mr. Bradshaw delivered startling discourses, and the good country-people flocked to hear him, and listened open-mouthed. There were two countrymen once who had been sitting out an exciting melodrama, and one asked the other what he "made on't."

"I don't know rightly what it's all about, but it's blessed cutting," was the other one's answer.

Probably some of these simple rustics did not too clearly comprehend what William Bradshaw's discourse was all about, but nevertheless found it improving. "He stir'ee oop, dont'ee?" was a question not unfrequently to be heard. "Eh, but he do so, sure-ly," was generally the answer.

They came and listened silently in large numbers. When the sermon was over, they gathered up their hats and umbrellas, and blundered noisily out into the open air. For the most part they separated and went their ways without a word. Some hazarded vague enquiries of one another.

"Well, Maister? What didst make o' that like?"

"He ga' it soom on 'em,—did na he?"

"Tha'rt reight there, mon," and they separated, with nods and winks full of hidden meaning.

Yet it must not be supposed from this that the language William used was very difficult to comprehend, or that his arguments were obscure and complicated. The congregation for whom he catered were, perhaps, a little wooden-headed and obtuse, and to stir them at all—though not deep enough to reach the thicknesses of their understandings—was nevertheless a triumph. The manner of his discourse was homely and simple. He gave a local colouring to his sermon, and sometimes even brought in the names of members of the congregation, at which names the owners pricked up their ears and blushed and shuffled uneasily, whilst the rest turned round and craned their necks to get a view of them ; and these allusions were surprisingly successful.

Each discourse,—for he preached only once in each village,—was followed by a collection, and some of those sitting near the door might, had there been any forewarning of the sermon's end, have shuffled out in time to save their pockets ; but one peculiarity of William's was to end suddenly without a moment's preparation, and then, at a sign from him, the plates were rapidly circulated, the raid beginning in the neighbourhood of the door.

Nor was much meanness practicable, for William would,

whilst the collection was in progress, urge his hearers to give all they could ; and not, as he put it, bargain for their soul's salvation with a handful of greasy halfpence, when they had silver in their pockets they could spare.

" You're better off in this village than they are at the one I've just come from, and I shall expect a richer plate. You'll put in all you can now after what I've said, or you ought to be ashamed of yourselves. I don't envy any man's feelings who at this moment is slipping in a penny, when he ought to be giving a shilling."

These remarks did in truth urge the naturally niggardly to unwonted generosity, and few got off as cheaply as they intended to have done. Some afterwards, in a fashion, apologised to one another for their liberality, as though they were ashamed of it ; and some said the discourse was worth double the money ; even the scoffers owned it was worth listening to, if only for the humorous anecdotes with which it was interspersed ; not really so very humorous perhaps, but a little fun goes a long way under certain circumstances.

In the house without a number, down the nameless street of Straggleton New Town, the unworthy relatives of the great reformer were in a sinful and worldly way enjoying themselves.

The card-parties continued. There had been a day-journey to the Zoological Gardens, and a night-trip to the Polytechnic. Once in a moment of extreme jollity, after a glass of something that had followed a crab supper, James spoke of the real theatre, and proposed taking a box. Ann's eyes sparkled, but Mrs. Whitaker protested.

" No—no ! I won't do that, James. I never would, and I never will. When your uncle was employed there, we had often tickets ; but I never thought it was right. We did go once, Sam and me. We were late and had a bad place behind a pillar, with the draught of the door right in the nape of my neck. I wasn't at all comfortable all the time, and when they began swearing and murdering one another, I just got up and said to your uncle, ' You may stop here as long as you like, Sam, but I won't.' It was that Montmorenci at number six in our court was the worst. I never could bear the man, and wouldn't have sat down to the same table with such wickedness for fear the food should choke me."

Under these circumstances all thought of playgoing was for the time abandoned, and no more amateur performances were just then in progress. Apropos of this subject, however, it should be mentioned that Don Cæsar called one day.

Upon this occasion again he was without the ringlets and russet boots, but the Don Cæsar airs and graces were still there, and as effective as ever. Now there were probably many richer, handsomer, cleverer gentlemen in the world than Don Harry Draper de Bazan, but then if there were they did not accompany him arm-in-arm to Mrs. Whitaker's little drawing-room, and so there was no one there to dispute the great and glorious victory our hero achieved.

There was present at the time, it is true, a somewhat mean and meagre dark-faced man called James Jarman, who indeed had brought the hero with him, and who sat listening with genuine admiration to Don Cæsar's talk. This talk was not remarkably witty, but there was a certain glibness about it which was captivating. It very soon appeared that such talents and virtues as Mr. Harry Draper possessed were not overlooked by their owner; but it must also be owned that he was conscious of his faults.

"I'm abominably idle," he said; "I've never had much reason to try and make a name for myself. It's been an unlucky thing for me in some respects that I was born well enough off to be able to live without work; though if it had been otherwise, I should have missed a good many things, the pleasure of meeting you among others."

"How so?" asked Mrs. Whitaker.

"Did not Jarman tell you how we made each other's acquaintance? No?—then I will. You must know I am supposed to be a barrister-at-law—that is, I have a wig and gown and chambers in the Temple; I've tried the two first on to see how I looked in them, and I have got them put away very carefully in a couple of boxes. The chambers I share with another man who is also a barrister-at-law, who does nothing in the legal way. He writes for newspapers, and I do the same in a small way when the fit takes me. Jarman here wanted some lawyer's work done, and made enquiries about a barrister. A mutual friend waggishly suggested my chum. My chum was equal to the occasion and suggested me."

"And so I went to see you," said Jarman.

"The visit was unprofessional," continued Don Cæsar; "for he ought not to have approached my august presence except through the medium of a respectable attorney. But he didn't do this, and he paid the penalty. At the time he called I was rehearsing."

"I thought it was a charge to the jury," said Jarman, "when I caught a confused sound of it on the staircase."

At this Don Cæsar blushed just a little, for the idea of his being overheard spouting blank-verse was not altogether dignified; however, he very readily took the bull by the horns, and laughed pleasantly at his own expense.

"The fact is, I was making a fool of myself. It wasn't fair of Jarman to take me unawares in that way—to catch me behind the scenes. But I made him promise to keep my secret. He will never tell you how ridiculous he thought me."

As Draper left the story here, Jarman took it up, and explained how, finding that the barrister was not exactly the person he had come in quest of, was going away again in a huff, when his new acquaintance offered him a cigar and his advice, and he had stopped and smoked, and in the end made vows of friendship, eventually taking his departure with the tickets in his pocket for the celebrated performance.

Mrs. Whitaker here broke in.

"Oh, it was capital—capital! Ann here has done nothing but talk of it ever since, and went to town on purpose to buy the book. You know you did, Ann. Where's that little book now of 'Julius Cæsar'? I dare say Mr. Draper would like to look at it."

"No, no, mamma. How can you?"

Mr. Draper, smarting a little at the good lady's blunder in the title, looked as pleasant as he could. He turned to Ann.

"You are fond of theatricals?"

"I have not had much experience. I think I am."

"You have never taken any part in a performance?"

"Oh, no—never."

"But you should do. I am sure you would make a good actress. You have the face, and figure, the voice. If you would only try, I could give you such a nice character in a piece we are getting up."

"I'm sure we are much obliged to you, Sir," Mrs. Whitaker

said, coming quickly to the rescue. "But I don't think we should like that. You know, Ann, how much William would disapprove—"

"Your husband, Madam?" said Draper, interrogatively.

"No; my nephew, to whom Ann is—"

"Papa didn't object, as you and William do, to the theatre," broke in Ann. "How could he? or else he would not have been at one himself."

"Ann!" cried Mrs. Whitaker, in a warning voice and with a warning expression of countenance. But the visitor did not notice these signs. He went on with great interest. "Your papa at the theatre? Indeed! Which theatre? Did he act under his own name?"

"He was not an actor," said Ann.

"He was more in the mechanical department," continued Mrs. Whitaker; and then with a bold dash at a word she had somewhere heard before, "he mounted all the pieces."

"Oh," said Draper; who, like most amateurs, prided himself upon his knowledge of the technicalities, and did not like to expose his ignorance by asking any further questions.

Shortly afterwards he took his departure, and more than once smiled to himself as the Hansom cab he had hailed conveyed him swiftly towards the Temple. Arrived here, he found the chum he had spoken of preparing to sally forth in quest of dinner. The chum asked him to come also.

"I suppose I might as well, but I'm not at all hungry, I've eaten so much tea-cake."

"Tea-cake!" the other echoed. "For a wager, perhaps. Where?"

"No. I've won nothing by it—at least, not as yet. In the bosom of a respectable family, if you know what that is, Tom Yolland."

"Good gracious!"



CHAPTER XI.

Draper could not eat very much, he drank a little more than usual, and was very merry, smiling more than once at his own thoughts without imparting the subject to his friend.

"What makes you grin so?" asked the other. "Is it the tea-cake?"

"Tell me all you know about that fellow Jarman you sent to see me the other day. Who is he?"

"I know very little about him; I met him at 'The Roughs.' I don't think he's a member of the club, and I don't know who brought him there. He joined in the conversation, and somehow he and I walked away together. Out in the street he asked me whether I was a barrister, and if so whether I would like a brief. I couldn't think of anyone who cared less about such a thing, except yourself; so I sent him to you."

"What do you think of him?"

"You know more of him than I do. You've seen him since, haven't you?"

"From what you saw of him, what was your opinion?"

"I don't know that I've got one. Yes I have though. He seemed to entertain some strange ideas about—poetical justice, and that sort of thing; and argued the expediency of taking the law into one's own hands, under certain circumstances. He had travelled abroad a good deal, he said; and it struck me he might have had a sunstroke."

"What? you thought him a little wild?"

"Yes, a little. Unpractical, at any rate. What do you make of him? where does he live?"

"You can hardly say he belongs to this world at all. At least, he resides at a house without a number, in a street without a name, in a half-built suburb, altogether beyond the realms of civilisation; and it seems he boards there with some relations."

"What is he? Anything?"

"Less than nothing, as well as I can make out. He appears to have money."

"Not much, I should think, to live in an out-of-the-way place like that, unless there are attractions."

"As far as the locality goes, nothing could be more undesirable."

"Then there must be some other reason. By-the-way, what did he want a barrister for?"

"By-the-way, he never told me."

"But you asked him?"

"I certainly did. I asked him twice, now I come to think of it, and both times he turned the conversation."

"Depend upon it, he's a man of mystery. He has most likely committed a dreadful crime. You must see to this. We ought to work it into something for one of the magazines, or couldn't you use it for the famous novel?"

This famous novel was one long talked of, which was some day to be expected from the pen of Harry Draper, Esqre. Other things, too, had been expected from Harry Draper. He was one of those young men of brilliant parts who are always upon the very eve of achieving fame, but don't.

He was, as has been said, a handsome fellow. He was also a clever actor. His contributions to literature evinced decided genius—or what passes for it. He had that happy way of persuading the reader he had to do with a writer of superior information, who took him into his confidence without being insultingly patronising.

There were few things that he tried at which he did not acquit himself creditably; but he wanted to be best at everything: he was not content unless he was one of the foremost in the race of life: and unfortunately he was not strong enough for the hard work. For a short struggle he had pluck enough and to spare, but he could not keep up the pace. Yet he never owned himself beaten, or cried off.

To look at the arrangement of his bed-room one would have supposed it to belong to a sort of Guy Livingstone, or, say, to one of those impossible heroes of the wonderful Ouida. (It must do a cynic's heart good to know that the female mind can conceive such a preposterously robust, manly, diabolically clever ideal of a trousers-wearer).

There were, to begin with, toilet arrangements upon a large scale. A shower-bath, a sponging-bath, a multiplicity of pitchers, towels of exceeding roughness, sand-balls, and flesh brushes. The severity of his lavatory operations were enough for a timid mollycoddle to wake up in the middle of a winter's night and shiver at the thought of. Now, Harry Draper's medical adviser had, upon several occasions, suggested that sanitary measures of a less violent character should be adopted, but our hero persevered, though he every day underwent a kind of martyrdom.

Upon the walls hung highly-finished lithographs of female loveliness recumbent, together with some sporting prints—hunting pictures, and portraits of the winners of the St. Leger and the Cesarewitch. There were also boxing-gloves and foils, and a hunting whip and a pair of spurs. The whole arranged in picturesque confusion, which was the result of much study.

It is the object of life with many beardless youths to be thought sad dogs and devils of fellows, and it was Harry Draper's ambition to be thus reputed, yet he was not wholly a shallow pretender. He lived fast—that is, as fast as he could, for it did not particularly agree with him. Sometimes he broke down altogether, and was obliged to lay up—then he rallied again, and fought his way to the front, jostling the heavier weights—the giants of iron frame, who, unconscious that an effort was required, had not turned a hair in the heat in which our weakling had come to grief.

Perhaps after all he was a pretender—a sham Guy Livingstone—but he never in his life lost faith in his own powers. Even when he was gasping on a sick bed he treated his sufferings lightly, and was, between paroxysms, the same defiant fellow he ever had been.

It was in this wise. At the cigar shop you might have found the man packing up a box of large and powerful regalias. They were “for Mr. Draper, Sir. He likes them *very* full flavoured.” At the wine merchant's that case was again “for Mr. Draper, Sir. The very oldest—the very

driest." Mr. Draper would drink nothing which wasn't the very somethingest—the correct thing, in fact. Perhaps, at the livery stables, there was an untamed Arab awaiting him. What else? He was evidently a very extraordinary person, and one was so impressed with his wonderful qualities, before seeing him, that it took a long time afterwards to find him out.

As far as Draper himself was concerned, he never thoroughly found himself out to his dying day.

There are three male persons—as the reader may have chanced to notice—in this history who resembled one another very strongly in one particular, they all believed in themselves implicitly. Each of the three had also his admirer or admirers, who believed in him also. In the first place, there was William Bradshaw, who might have numbered his believers by the thousand. Then there was that man at the post office, of the name of Pickering, whose believers were less numerous and not so long enduring, but then he had a mother whose belief was strong enough to have been divided amongst a hundred other persons, allowing a large share to each. Finally, there was our hero, Harry Draper, who did not, as the reader knows already, lack admirers. Presently we shall find that there is one in particular who is down on her knees worshipping him with a blind devotion, which may perhaps distinguish her from the rest of the true believers, and even attract the favourable attention of the demi-god—hitherto somewhat superciliously inclined towards his humble disciples.

Now what on earth could so distinguished a gentleman—so much run after, with so many claims upon his time—want wasting his precious hours up a paltry street of Straggleton New Town? There can be no doubt in the world that he might have found much better company and spent his time more profitably in a score of other places, but here he was, three or four times a week, for two or three hours at a stretch, in Mrs. Whitaker's parlour, talking of Heaven knows what, and the rest of it. But why? Because, let us suppose, he had taken a great fancy to James Jarman.

One evening he came to dinner. Jarman, without mistrusting Mrs. Whitaker's good intentions, thought it as well to enter into a contract for the supply of all the eatables from a pastrycook's in the neighbourhood. Upon another

occasion the four went together to a panorama, James escorting the elder lady.

"I never knew the like," said Mrs. Whitaker. "How gay we're getting, and whatever will——"

"Mrs. Grundy say?" added James Jarman.

The person he thus nicknamed was now expected daily. The guilty women quaked and trembled at every double knock. What an awful life they had been leading! Had a diary been kept of their words and deeds during the last month, there was scarcely a day when something wrong had not happened—something, at any rate, that William would not have approved of.

"I do wonder," Mrs. Whitaker said to Ann,—"I do wonder how William will get on with James."

"Oh, very well I should think, mamma," replied the girl; yet she could never have thought anything of the kind.

"But they are really so different in so many respects," said mamma.

"They are very different," said Ann, thoughtfully.

Mrs. Whitaker went on wondering. "I wonder," said she, "what he will say to Mr. Draper."

"What has he got to say?" asked Ann. "How do you do? I suppose. I don't know what else. I don't see what he should have to say to Mr. Draper more than to any other person."

"Certainly not, my dear," replied mamma in a conciliatory tone. "I don't see how he can for a moment; unless, indeed——"

"Unless what?"

"Unless, perhaps, he thinks it odd we should have made so many new acquaintances."

"Is one many, mamma?"

"One is one too many sometimes, my dear," said the old lady; and there is every reason to believe she very nearly made a joke this time; at any rate, she herself laboured under the impression that she had done so.

At last the hour came, and with it the man. Rat-tat-atat-tat.

He had written the day before, and named the hour when he might be expected. It is strange how provokingly things will happen sometimes. Mr. Harry Draper came the day before, just before William's letter arrived, proposing a visit

to a morning concert next day, for which he had tickets. The ladies, dreaming not that the end was nigh, accepted his offer readily. Then the postman arrived with news from the seat of war, and an apology had to be sent to the Temple.

Rat-tat-atat-tat. This time there could be no mistake about it. The servant girl, somehow an accomplice in the goings on aforesaid, heard and recognised the knock, and came up stairs with a guilty look.

"We shall all catch it, I suppose," she said. "I'll get mine over first."

"Hannah," said Mrs. Whitaker, in astonishment, "I'm surprised at you." But she thought afterwards it would have been a more dignified course on her part had she pretended not to understand. She did understand, however, perfectly, and Hannah knew it.

Upon the very threshold William Bradshaw made his first discovery. He stopped short suddenly and sniffed the air.

"What a smell of tobacco!" he said. "Who has been smoking?"

Hannah had made up her mind for rebellion. A short but desperate struggle she was resolved upon. "Who is he, I should like to know, coming here to cross-question one upon the door-mat?"

She tossed her head, and replied, "I'm sure I don't know, Sir."

William remained stock still, his eyes fixed upon her in a sort of sad wonder. "Don't know! You cannot mean that, my good girl. You must know."

"Well, I've not seen anyone smoking this morning; but if you're particularly anxious about it, I should think it's Mr. Jarman. He very seldom has a pipe out of his mouth."

There was here surely sufficient occasion for the administration of a gentle rebuke, but Mr. Bradshaw seemed too much surprised by the matter to think of the manner. Mrs. Whitaker, who was half-way up the kitchen stairs at the time, overheard what had passed, and came panting to the rescue.

"How do you do, my dear William? How can you stand there talking such nonsense, Hannah?" Then, in an apologetic undertone, "Your cousin does smoke sometimes, William. It's being so much abroad, you know. I dare say that is where he picked up the habit."

"It's almost better to remain in one's own country, than to go abroad only to pick up bad habits," William said.

"Oh, but he has picked up other things besides, you know, William," Mrs. Whitaker hastened to add. "Such a fortune, too, it seems!"

William did not look at all pleased. He glanced round and saw the piano.

"What's that?"

"James bought it for us, William. It is such a nice one—such a sweet tone."

William offered no remark. There were some pieces of music lying about, and he raised them one by one to look at the names, but without expressing any opinion regarding them. Mrs. Whitaker followed his every movement in great perturbation. At last he asked impatiently,—

"Where is she? Where's Ann?"

Ann was all this while up stairs unconscious of William's return. She came down singing the air of the Soldiers' Chorus from "Don Cæsar." That curl, to which allusion has been previously made, was floating on her shoulder and fluttering in the air as she approached. If she had known who had been waiting there to meet her, she would probably have pinned it up. Had she known, she might have desisted from singing.

Had she known—but she knew nothing. She opened the parlour door without the least idea who was inside, and came in radiant—happy—almost beautiful, and found herself face to face with William Bradshaw.

But William Bradshaw's face did not wear at all the same sort of expression it had done when first he smelt the tobacco-smoke or dropped his eyes upon the piano. It must not be supposed, because he had not the most agreeable way in the world of showing his affection, that he did not love his cousin Ann.

He did love her, only he was a little doubtful of the match being a suitable one. Just now he had been absent from her a full month, and had thought of her many, many times, although his attention was so much occupied by other more serious matters. He loved her, too, very much indeed, in his own way, and that way you may rest assured he would have logically proved (with, as Mrs. Whitaker would have said, "chapter and verse") to be

the right way and the only way, after which came no others.

He had made his mind up during his homeward journey that the marriage should take place at no distant period, and he intended proposing this very morning to go into the matter—and into another matter, of which more anon. He did love Ann, of course, or else it was very certain that he need not look far for a wife. There were indeed wives in plenty to be had, and rich ones, too, if William chose to ask them, but he was proud in his way—proud of his own talent and power. It is true that he might immediately have obtained an enviable position with the means at his command which a rich marriage would procure for him; but then was he not able to earn money enough by his talent to keep the wife of his choice—the woman of his heart? It should never be said that William Bradshaw sold himself for gold.

As Ann came in so gay and pretty William advanced towards her eagerly. She changed colour slightly at sight of him.

“Oh, William, I did not know you were here.”

“You expected me though, did not you? How very well you are looking. Have I not been a long while away?”

“Yes, a long while.”

“I’ve come to take *you* away now. Don’t look frightened. Only to St. Hornet’s, to the chapel—the old chapel, for it is to be enlarged or rebuilt directly. Will you come?”

“Of course if you wish it, William.”

“I think you will not object when I tell you why.”

Mrs. Whitaker had left the room, and he was sitting by Ann’s side on the sofa. With quite an unusual demonstration of affection his arm stole round her waist. When she glanced down, colouring slightly, she saw his hand was encased in a black thread glove, and wondered for the first time whether he liked them better than kid, or wore them because he could not afford the latter.

“We must get married now, you know, Ann, very soon. We have been a long while about it, have not we? Well, there are some people of influence in the parish who attend my chapel, and with whom I ought to stand well—not only for my own sake——” Here his encircling arm

squeezed her closer. "It would be advisable, then, for you to make their acquaintance, Ann. Will you let me introduce you this afternoon?"

She was for a moment silent, and he, wondering why she was so, looked at her anxiously. Now, the reason of her silence was that she was thinking to herself,—

"We are soon to be married. The time has now arrived when the engagement is to take a settled form. I am to be introduced to these people as William's future wife. After that there can be no change—I must marry William then."

"Well, Ann?"

"Yes—yes, of course."

Certainly of course. Why, had it not all been settled ever so long ago? Of course—very much of course. Why, it was such a settled thing now that she was to be William's wife when she was a wife at all, that in her eyes marrying could have only one meaning—marrying meant marrying William.





CHAPTER XII.

WHEN, some time since, mention was made of a chapel that had been built by subscription for William Bradshaw, the reader was perhaps inclined to picture to himself a building of about the size of Mr. Spurgeon's Tabernacle. But that was not the case. This chapel was the same of which William spoke as about to be enlarged.

At present it was capable of holding, when tightly packed, about four hundred persons. Of late, since Mr. Bradshaw had been so famous, it had generally been very tightly packed indeed, and so there was talk of enlargement or rebuilding.

St. Hornet's was every bit as badly disposed a parish as St. Starver's. Yet, happily, it numbered among its residents many pious people, and these formed a little world all by itself, which ignored the outer and wicked world, and was very busy over its own little businesses, and made its hay whilst the sun shone. This little world, without entirely neglecting worldly things, nevertheless paid due regard to things spiritual, and supported its chapel staunchly.

That Mr. Wapshot who first brought William Bradshaw out had brought him from the parish of St. Starver's to the parish of St. Hornet, when the Board of Works condemned Stonywold Court and its surroundings, and for some time the former gentleman continued extremely popular, as we have seen he was in the old time. Then William began to be spoken of favourably as a rising light—a sort of smaller light added to the Wapshot lustre. Presently he began to show signs

of a style of his own, and then some symptoms of dissent from the old orthodox Wapshot doctrine. After a short time unpleasantnesses arose between Mr. Wapshot, now growing somewhat old and feeble, and William Bradshaw, full of strength and vigour, and equal to the slaying of any number of controversial giants. Then at last they came to an open rupture, and went their separate ways, William taking with him three parts of the congregation upon *his* way to an opposition chapel built for him in the next street.

Putting forth some of his old energy, Mr. Wapshot strove hard to regain his lost flock, but William, now fairly launched, put forth on his side such new and attractive theological wares that there was no fighting against him. Furthermore, not only did he keep Mr. Wapshot's hundred and fifty, but picked up between two and three hundred fresh ones on his own account.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that William's vanity was flattered by the small crowds gathering round him, or that, as is not uncommon with rising lights in this world, he began to confound somewhat his real success, as it existed, with the greater successes that were to come—sooner or later. When a while ago we heard him talk of the newspapers greedily picking up every stray scrap of scandal regarding him, or something to that effect, we might have thought the whole press was on the look-out, note-book in hand, at every turn the gentleman took. But this was not, strictly speaking, the fact.

He had been noticed once or twice in the large daily papers — not always flatteringly. His eccentricities had brought him into public notice for awhile ; but London is a dreadful place for swallowing up lives, and forgetting the *menu* of its yesterday's dinner. There is so much doing, there are so many of us—great Heaven, how many of us!—living, breathing men and women, with souls to save or lose, go to make up a nought in a million, and that is about all the rest of the nation ever know of us.

Therefore it may not surprise you much to hear that there were among the ungodly many, though residing in the very street where William's chapel was built, who had never heard of him, and in their pig-headed pagan way of looking at things, never wanted to. About ten yards off William's chapel was the Little Orpheus Music Hall, with the interior of which the ungodly were well acquainted, and the popular

vocalists of this establishment (the Great Somebody, the world-famed Somebody Else, and the inimitable Third Person) were well known in other parishes where William as yet had not been heard of.

Strange to say, however, William's chapel was built upon the site of a music-hall demolished for that purpose, and this was a great triumph for the right-minded, until the unbelieving got hold of the ground-lease of an old-established chapel further up the street, and turned it into the identical Little Orpheus above mentioned. Here, on week nights, during the summer months, were holden comic festivals, and through the windows floated the tail-ends of popular choruses, to the discomfiture of the hymn-singers two doors further down, who were either compelled to shut themselves up and be half stifled, or be cool and airy and everlastingly outraged in their moral feelings.

Upon the particular afternoon when Ann accompanied William to the scene of his spiritual labours, there was great excitement, in a small way, in the part of the parish of St. Hornet's where William's chapel was situate. In some other parts of the parish, indeed in the parish generally, not to mention the world beyond, there were a great many persons in total ignorance of the fact that anything at all out of the common was occurring. But the excitement down the street in question was tremendous.

From an early hour there were parties in aprons and paper-caps, very hard at work carrying to and fro benches and tables, which were being arranged in the vestry. Great strokes of carpentering were going on, wood chips and shavings littered the chapel floor. An aged person of the softer sex, though hardened somewhat in the course of an unduly protracted spinsterhood, swept up these same shavings and chips at intervals prematurely to find the floor a while after littered again.

One of the ungodly from the Little Orpheus also lent assistance, and brought a bench or two, that were passed off among the rest quite innocently, and the gross unsuitableness of their introduction was never commented upon. Corrupted, probably, by the music-hall man, some of the other workpeople joined in a quart of beer, the tin cans presently creating some scandal when found in a quiet corner behind the chapel door.

The work generally had the night before been super-

intended by William Bradshaw himself. He was not ashamed to let it be known that in his youth he had handled a saw and plane. He handled both now very cleverly in effecting some little alteration which he thought necessary, and aptly improved the occasion with a reference to a certain other carpenter who lived a thousand and odd years ago.

Before the tables and benches were arranged, hampers began to arrive containing crockery, knives and spoons, and then came a large supply of loaves, cakes, butter, and watercresses. There was, in fact, going to be a friendly tea-meeting, to which the price of admission was only sixpence, inclusive of refreshment, physical and mental, without any restriction.

With the avowed intention of having a good sixpenny-worth, many worthy persons put in an early appearance that afternoon, and appropriated seats in close vicinity to the several tea-trays. These visitors were of all ages and of both sexes, and some were, perhaps, a little too young, and therefore wanting in self-control in the matter of seed cakes. In the minds of some of the most elderly, too, there appeared to exist unfounded suspicions of foul play as regarded the quality of the tea received at their particular table, and lurking doubts as to whether or not some one in some sly corner was not wrongfully getting radishes as well as watercresses ; but, as a general rule, contentment prevailed, and, to tell the truth, there was still an abundance of food remaining after everybody had eaten plentifully.

It was at this festival that William was anxious that Ann should be present, and she and her mamma accompanied him thither at his desire. The latter lady was in all her splendour, but William did not particularly notice her. At a glance he noted the general effect, which was substantial. She might have been an old lady very well off—warm, as the saying was, in this little community. At Ann's dress, however, he gazed long and somewhat nervously.

He did not altogether approve of Ann's mode of dressing, and yet he could not help allowing to himself that it was very pretty and becoming. If the truth must be told, there was what most ladies will understand by a theatrical style about Ann's toilet. This, gentlemen will please to remark, does not mean anything gaudy in colour or expensive in material. There is a sort of dash and style—which English

writers who know a little French are fond of calling *chic*—that may go with very cheap materials, but which the generality of respectable middle-class people look at shyly.

There are scarcely any women of any class of life who follow the fashions otherwise than at a distance—for the most part accepting a new style only half-way, and with extensive modifications. The male persons who have to pay the bills for all the newly-invented finery and faldedals, very naturally (artful male persons) pooh-pooh all radical reforms, while there are some who only unwillingly consent to any deviation from the dress that won their hearts at the beginning—the dear old unapproachable style of Love's young dreamy days. The result of all which is, that the generality of women are dowdies, let their age and nation be what it may.

William Bradshaw, eyeing Ann askance, asked himself what it was he did not approve of, and where he could suggest an alteration; but he was helpless. Instinctively he felt that they would not altogether like her at the chapel; but then he said to himself, "Am I not my own master? Am I going to allow them to choose my wife for me? If she pleases me, is not that enough? I am not one to be swayed by the prejudices of others."

And when he was thus thinking, he really believed that public opinion had no weight with him. Very soon he was put to the test.

On their way to the omnibus he noticed more than one person turn to look after his cousin, and fancied that their faces wore a knowing sort of smile. There certainly was what people call a "fastness" about her dress which must be rectified at an early date. Still she was very nice. If he had had his choice, there was nothing he would have changed. After all too, as he had settled long ago, was he not his own master?

"How very quiet you both are," Mrs. Whitaker observed. Neither of the lovers had said a word for full twenty-five minutes.

Ann coloured up, for she had been thinking—not of William, or of friendly tea-meetings.

"One can't talk in an omnibus. There's such a noise."

"Yes, there's such a noise," said William.

When they reached the chapel, the tea was just going to commence. The tea indeed was already made and brewing.

The greater part of the company were seated, and it appeared as though the ceremony was only waiting for William Bradshaw's appearance.

He was vexed at this; his watch had been five minutes slow; Ann's toilet had kept him waiting. They also had to wait for an omnibus. The result was, a forced procession down the middle of the room, and under the eyes of the assembled company. The table at which seats had been retained for him was right at the other end of the room, and as he and the ladies passed on their way it seemed to him that every eye was fixed upon them.





CHAPTER XIII.

MIS table was distinguished from the rest by the fact that, at one end of it, a dozen chairs were set instead of forms ; and these were intended for the better sort of visitors.

The better sort were for the most part plump and portly ; but there was one dark visaged, mean little man, in a shiny new black coat, some sizes too large for him, who was evidently a person of great importance.

He was indeed a grocer, of the next street—a bachelor and very rich—who was to be one of the great motive-powers in the matter of enlargement or rebuilding. Mr. Salmon had promised to put down three hundred pounds. As yet he would not altogether promise to make William Bradshaw a free gift of the money. He proposed that it should stand for a while as a friendly loan, without interest.

Upon the other side of the table, just opposite, sat Mrs. and the two Misses Hodson. Mrs. Hodson had put down four hundred pounds, and promised more. It was only a question of time and management what that sum was to be. At any rate, the ladies were worth cultivating. Upon this occasion particular instructions had been given relative to her entertainment. Her chair was to be set out of the draught from the window, and she and her daughters were to have cream in their tea.

William entered the vestry, in which the entertainment was to take place, leading the way, his aunt and cousin following. At their approach all heads turned. There was some faint applause and unlimited staring. William

made for his table, and in some confusion almost thrust the ladies into their places. Then himself shook hands, right and left, rather awkwardly. The eyes of the other people at the tea-table settled steadily upon Ann.

William was fretting at the unlucky way things had fallen out. Mrs. Hodson was not sitting where he had understood she was to sit, or Ann's chair was lower down. Somebody was between, and so an introduction could not be easily effected; nor could any change now be made in the arrangement, for everyone was waiting for him to say grace.

Somewhere or other there must have been a large boiler constantly on the boil to supply the ever-empty teapots, which in regular succession passed in and out of the vestry-door to some unknown regions beyond, to be replenished. Who shall say how many cups full some of the fair tea-drinkers disposed of? One opposite to Ann drank six, and ate eight slices of bread and butter, growing very hot and flushed towards the close of the banquet.

Mrs. Hodson was not above partaking of the simple fare here set forth, and did so with good will; but she was not so occupied as to have no eyes for the strangers. Between her mouthfuls she whispered Martha, her eldest born—

“Who is that strange-looking girl Mr. Bradshaw brought in with him?”

“She's something foreign, I think,” Martha replied.

“I don't like the style, whatever it may be,” snorted the elder lady.

None of the ladies at this table were very partial to the style, which certainly wasn't chapel style, or lower middle-class in St. Hornet's. From the first moment Ann took her seat amongst them, a feeling of resentment began to smoulder in the females around her. When she was discussed afterwards at select meetings, it was distinctly settled that Ann had not a passable feature in her face. It is a provoking fact—there is no denying it though—that it is those ones who haven't as much as an eyelash that is altogether what it ought to be, who carry off the palm from others ever so much their mental and physical superiors.

The festival proceeded. Ann, as it was afterwards described, “sat mincing over” her bread-and-butter. She did not, indeed, think very highly of the entertainment. She was much diverted by the voracious lady opposite. The build—which was amazing—of Mrs. Hodson's bonnet,

also afforded her some amusement. She took mental notes, with the intention of caricaturing the good company in some other company more congenial to her taste. Afterwards, this other company laughed heartily at the picture, and said what fun she must have had ; but it was, Ann thought, small fun at the time.

During the repast, there was a little talk, at intervals, between the reverend gentlemen present, theological and scientific ; but of a popular character, with jokes interspersed, merry but harmless. For the rest, little was said that bore not reference to the passing to and fro of more and more tea and slices of bread-and-butter ; and a thousand times might have been heard repeated such phrases as " May I trouble you, Ma'am ? "—" I really must trouble you again "—" I'm sure I'm very troublesome "—" It's no trouble, I assure you "—" No, I thank you, Ma'am ; I've done very nicely." " Well, since you *are* so pressing."

There were three or four young gentlemen present, who did not take their seats at the table. These pic-nicked roughly at a window, for the fun of the thing ; but mostly attended on the ladies. In this way some of the young and homely among the fair tea-drinkers were, if anything, overworried upon the subject of more plum-cake ; but were very wettily coy and playful, and all ate and drank more than was quite comfortable.

When tea was over, there was general conversation, some part-singing, and a little flirting in quiet corners ; and this opportunity William chose for introducing his future wife.

" I have two ladies here, who are very anxious for your good opinion, Mrs. Hodson," William said. " Will you allow me to present them to you. One of them I may introduce, at some future time, by another name."

The person to whom he spoke only partly comprehended his meaning. She received Ann coldly.

" This is your first visit, young lady. I hope you like us."

Ann made no answer, but raised her eyebrows and smiled faintly. Mrs. Whitaker, anxious to be affable, hastened to say—

" She will, I'm sure, Mum, when you're better acquainted. It's a pretty sight."

William explained, " This is my aunt, Mrs. Whitaker. I think I have spoken of her to you before."

"You do not attend this chapel, Ma'am?"

"Well no, Mum, we don't. The fact is, William, here—."

"My aunt lives at some distance."

Mrs. Whitaker was determined to be amiable. "Not so very far, either. We came to-day in a threepenny bus, and now we know the way—"

"I live three miles off myself, but I come regularly twice every Sunday," said Mrs. Hodson. "For convenience sake, I intend to change my house and come nearer. It is not easy to find as good a preacher as Mr. Bradshaw. You surprise me when you say this is your first visit."

William came to the rescue, and tried to set matters straight. Mrs. Hodson thought too highly of his poor talents, &c. Then he nervously whispered to Ann to say something of a conciliatory character. But Ann hung back.

"Who is she?" she asked. "What a common woman! What frights the girls are!"

One of these frights presently made advances on the subject of a recently formed Dorcas society, and descanted upon the merits of certain Thursday gatherings, whereat a small stock of baby-clothing, fashioned on a principle combining austere ugliness of cut with scantiness of material, was manufactured by the lady members, and got rather dirty during the process.

Ann listened and yawned. All her life she had heard this sort of thing. Why was she not interested? Certainly she was not. And why had William brought her there? This question she had asked herself more than once during the progress of the banquet. How was William's conduct to be accounted for? It seemed to her as though he had all at once made up his mind to fulfil the long-pending engagement, and marry her. She was here then, as it were, upon approval. If that were the case, they should have little to approve of. Who were they, pray, that she should value their good opinions?

"Do you do much needlework?" asked Martha.

"No, I hate it."

Martha was staggered, but did not give the case up at once.

"You prefer reading?"

"I never read. It sends me to sleep."

Why should she have said such things? But perhaps at

the moment she believed them to be true. She hated everything just then. Leaning over to her mother, who was having a very uphill sort of conversation with Mrs. Hodson, she said—

“Are we going to stop much longer, mamma? I think it is coming on to rain.”

“We shall go soon, I suppose,” replied Mrs. Whitaker. “We are waiting for William, you know. But there’s no hurry, my dear, I’m sure. It’s been a very pleasant afternoon.”

“It’s dreadfully hot; and there’s such a smell of tallow candles!” replied the perverse girl.

This smell of tallow candles arose from the fact that some were at the moment being lighted in unknown regions behind, but Mrs. Hodson did not know that this was the case, and frowned and blushed crimson. Only a long while afterwards Ann learnt that it was by candle-making the late Mr. Hodson had accumulated a large fortune, and that his widow still carried on the trade at the manufactory in Battersea.

It was true that it was beginning to rain. Overhead there was a skylight upon which the heavy drops rattled noisily. Hearing the sound, the majority of the company rose and began to talk of taking their departure.

William at this moment came up to his aunt.

“I must find you a cab,” he said. “You had better get away before the rush. You have a cab, I think you said, Mrs. Hodson?”

“Yes, thank you. We hired him and told him to wait, thinking there might be some trouble to get one when everybody was going away.”

The ladies exchanged the stiffest of bows at parting, and William hurried his aunt and Ann to the door.

There was a cab a few yards off, in front of the music hall. He called out, and the driver was summoned from the bar.

He gave the direction, and then shook hands very coldly with Ann. “Good-bye,” he said. “I am sorry now I troubled you to come all this way.”

She made him no answer, but turned her face from him. Mrs. Whitaker nodded and smiled to him as they drove away. Just as they turned the corner, Mrs. Hodson appeared by his side, and she was seen to wave her umbrella.

Mrs. Whitaker, supposing it to be a friendly greeting, waved her handkerchief in reply. Then the cab turned down the next street, and they were hidden from view.

"You don't mean to say, Mr. Bradshaw, you've put your people into my cab?"

"I had no idea it was your cab. The man said nothing."

"The man must have been drunk."

This was in truth the case. The fatal proximity of the bar of the music hall was to blame.





CHAPTER XIV.

PERHAPS it was the tea or the seed-cake, or perhaps it was the jolting of the "nasty cab." Something or other had given Mrs. Whitaker a headache, and when they reached home, at half-past seven o'clock, she went straight to bed.

James Jarman had just come in, and was sitting before his fire with a book. When he heard that Ann was alone he came down to keep her company, but he had hardly taken his seat before there came a knock at the street door.

It was Don Cæsar, in gorgeous evening dress. He too had just dined and driven over in a cab. He had a box for the opera, and was to have gone with a friend, but the friend had disappointed him. He did not care to go by himself.

"But you will never waste the ticket!" cried Ann.

Draped smiled at her earnestness. "I suppose so. Why?"

"Oh, what a pity! Oh, how I wish——"

"Wish what?" asked Draper, eagerly. "If you would only care to go, I would get a box any night."

"Ah! if I might——"

"What would William say?" broke in Jarman, with a slight curl of his lip. "Yet it would be great fun, wouldn't it, after the tea-drinking too?"

"What to-night?" exclaimed Ann, with a bright sparkle in her eyes, and then in a moment she was solemn again. "Oh, the idea! It is impossible! Mamma would not allow it."

"Mamma would never know," said Jarman the tempter. "And there's your old middle-aged relative to take care of you. With a fast cab we might get there and back in no time, and have an hour or two of paradise. It would be like paradise, with the thousand lights, the rich dresses, the heavenly music!"

"Oh, James, but you know—And a theatre, too!"

"Not as bad as a theatre quite, because it is all singing and in a foreign language: not nearly so wicked."

"But mamma——"

"She'll never know, and I'll take the blame if she does."

"And—and—and——"

"He'll never know either."

What a night this was! The girl began a new life from this period—a new and wonderful life—so unreal, so fairy-like, so bewildering, so confusing by the side of the old humdrum existence hitherto. There were other ways of spending one's time besides staring hopelessly out of window on to a half-built street; there were aims and ends in womanly ambition besides being a good manager, clever at bakes and boils—a good mother, clever at baby culture.

Oh glorious dreamland! where the women were all beautiful, rich, fêted, petted, pampered, madly beloved—dreamland of a million glittering gems, insidious scents, soft languishing lights, grandly swelling music!

This was the opera then, and these real living women, sitting in a queenly beauty, calm and splendid. A glittering crowd filled the stage, and a hundred voices rose and fell as one. Darkness succeeded; a captive in a cell, a lady weeping, a chorus of monks or nuns unseen without. A low deep murmur, then a clear sweet voice swelling forth—passionately, hopelessly; then another voice despairingly, drowned in the rising murmur again. Ann's fingers tightened on James's arm, and a sob burst forth faintly from her white lips.

It was Draper who gently raised her in his arms and carried her towards the door. Jarman hurried away in quest of cold water. When he came back she was regaining consciousness. Just as he re-entered the darkened box her eyes opened, and she gazed up into Draper's face with a tearful smile.

"Harry!"

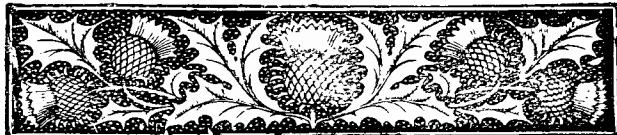
"She's better now. Why, Ann—Ann, we must never take you to the wicked playhouse any more if you go on this way. We had better go now. Have my scarf round your neck, dear. Come, Draper."

A crowd of carriages without, hoarse voices shouting, the gleaming of lights, the cab, a strangely confused homeward journey, and then again the old familiar parlour and the old familiar objects she knew so well. Was it really true that there was anything in existence such as she fancied she saw awhile ago?

Was it fancy, all of it? Was it fancy that some one had kissed her passionately and told her that he loved her?

"I hope that you are better now, Miss Whitaker. I have the honour of wishing you good-night."





CHAPTER XV.

AT noon next day came William Bradshaw. The servant was speaking to a tradesman at the door, and he therefore entered without knocking.

Ann was seated at the open piano in the parlour. She was not playing, but her hands rested listlessly upon the keys. She had been trying to recall something of the melody which had so delighted her last night. The whole seemed floating confusedly through her brain : but as yet she could but seize a stray note here and there.

As she sat there the recollection of the scene came back to her vividly ; the exquisite music, the darkened house hushed and breathless, her swoon, the low deep tones of his agitated voice. Her hands fell on her lap and her chin sank upon her breast. Then the door opened and William Bradshaw entered.

“ How do you do, Ann ? ” he said. “ I hope you have recovered from the fatigues of yesterday.”

There was a hidden meaning in his words. Did he know? She looked up with a flushed cheek.

“ What fatigues ? ”

“ You need not deny it,” he replied. “ I saw, of course, how distasteful our simple merrymaking was to you.”

“ Oh ! the merrymaking,” she said, with a little laugh ; “ that’s what you’re talking about.”

“ I came here to talk about it,” said William.

“ Put down your hat then, and sit down.”

It was rather a favourite attitude of William’s to stand up with his umbrella and hat behind him in his left hand, and with the right to beat time whilst he delivered himself sententiously upon various subjects.

He put down his hat now, when told to do so, somewhat sheepishly, and loaded it with a small packet of tracts which, as usual, he had brought with him.

"What are you doing, Ann?" he asked.

"Nothing."

"I wish you would try to employ yourself a little more—with some useful work. If you would join such a society as that Miss Martha Hodson has organised."

"Ah, yes, she told me. I told her I hated needlework."

"She repeated your remarks. I am sorry, Ann, that you should have lost your temper and spoken so rudely."

"I am very sorry, I'm sure; I was not in a good humour."

"I should have thought that out of consideration for my feelings you might have curbed your temper."

"I couldn't."

"I am sorry for that, Ann. It will be necessary for you to try."

"Why?"

"Because you must not insult my friends."

"Nothing is more easily avoided."

"I hope so."

"By taking care that we do not come in contact. If in future you keep your friends in their own sphere, while I remain in mine—if you remain with your friends—there will be no danger then."

William Bradshaw sat silent for a minute, he fancied he could not have heard aright. She had expressed herself somewhat obscurely. With an effort, he said—

"Ann, am I to understand that you wish our engagement to come to an end?"

"Yes!"

His face flushed darkly, and he nervously jerked on his gloves. "Very well," was all he said as he rose and took up his hat.

She had left the piano and taken her old favourite place at the window with her back turned towards him. His eyes wandered towards her again and again, and then round the room; he took off one glove and put it on again; he arranged the tracts and stowed them carefully away in his pocket. At last he burst out—

"Ann!"

"Yes."

"You—you really mean this?"

"Yes."

"You will regret it then. I cannot comprehend it. It is wholly incomprehensible. It is—it is—"

He could think of no other word, and banging on his hat moved towards the door. Here he paused again as though to give her a last chance; she did not take it, and he went his way. When he passed out at the end of the street, she sat down and began to cry.

Was she happy or sad at what had taken place? Why not happy? The sooner this mockery of love was brought to an end the better; yes, for now it was impossible that they could be married—impossible because—After all, though, why? Was she going to marry some one else? Whom? What reason had she for thinking so? Why, had he not told her that he loved her? Yes, certainly he had told her so. She was not dreaming, then; but was not he? Did he—could he mean it?

A tap at the door, and James Jarman entered.

"After all," said he, "what *does* William say? And—where is he?"

"Gone."

"What! gone again? What a mysterious William. He might have stopped to say how do you do to me, though. It seems to me very likely that I shall never meet him if he goes on in this way."

"I think he may never come here again, after what has happened."

By her tone James saw then that something *had* happened. He took his seat upon the sofa by her side, and asked her in a low voice what was the matter.

"I have just now been acting very badly—very unkindly. But how could I help it when he came here cross-questioning me—lecturing me?"

She was on the point of crying, but did not quite cry, keeping her tears down as it were, by mere force—by twisting her handkerchief very tightly round her left hand. James sat and listened.

"After all, I am glad it is over—I never could love him—I never have!"

"Never?"

"No—never; I am sure of it. Ever since we were children it has been a settled thing that we were to be married. I have never had a voice in the matter. It is un-

fair that I should have been so forced, and he also. He does not love me."

"What makes you think that?"

"I know it. Anyhow, he does not act as other people do when they love a person."

"We have all of us such different ways of showing what we feel," said James in a low voice; "and some never do make themselves understood—go down into their graves acting a part quite unlike their real selves—acting it, too, wholly against their own will. Why?"

She looked at him in some surprise. It seemed as though he were rather giving utterance to his thoughts than addressing these words to her.

"He would like the engagement broken off, I am sure," she went on. "He will be glad it is so when he comes to reflect. We are not suited to one another in any respect."

"Have you ever hinted at such an opinion before?" asked James. "Isn't this all rather sudden?"

"I have often thought it."

"Long ago?"

"Yes—no—not long ago."

"If you are sure that you know your own mind now—if you are quite sure—I think you are acting wisely. I have no right to interfere in the matter; but as you have spoken to me, will you let me see William and hear what he says?"

"No, dear James, I am quite decided—quite. It is impossible now, because—"

"Because what?"

He bent down his head eagerly, and the hand holding hers trembled. She made no answer.

"Do you remember, Ann, the old court days—those happy, old, ragged days when we were children together, before I went to Hankershanks's, when William and I were working for that famous prize for English history? What was it they gave me when I won it?—a book of poetry, I think; choice pieces from the best authors, in blue and gold. Do you remember?"

She nodded, but did not speak.

"William was a fine fellow in those times; there wasn't anyone of his age in the court—don't you recollect?—who could run, or wrestle, or box with him; there wasn't a game he was not the winner at. He was the handsomest, the bravest. He has fought your battles a score of times.

What a stupid little wretch I used to be by the side of him. Don't you recollect how I used to sit screwed up in a corner against that pump? I was awfully disappointed when I came back after my long absence to find they had not even left the pump."

He laughed here, but not very gaily. She listened with averted head.

"You did love him then, I think, Ann; I think I have heard you say so. I recollect I used to be very savage and jealous."

"But I do not now, James dear. Within the last week or two I have learnt my own mind. I do not—did not love him. I have often thought so, now I am certain, now that—I mean since the last week or two."

The hand holding hers trembled more. She went on—

"In those old court days I was wrong. How kind you always were to me—how blind I was to your kindness; but I am not so now."

He hung eagerly on each coming word. What next?

"I understand you now, James dear—I know now that you love me——"

"Yes."

"As a brother. And it is because I am sure that you would only advise me for my good that I ask you now what I should do. Oh, James, I cannot marry William, because—because I love another."

He dared not trust himself to speak. He dared not hope. As a prisoner upon his trial, whose life is at stake, eagerly scans the faces of the jury, so he sought to read what her verdict would be.

"You will not blame me, James dear, I am sure, although the rest may be against me. I could not help loving him. You brought him here. You took me first to see him. I should never have known him but for you. Oh, I do love him so!"

Do not we all talk in this fashion? If so and so had not happened! If you had only said! If I had only held my tongue! Some hours later James, sitting alone in his bedroom, his head resting on his hand, his eyes fixed gloomily upon a candle which burnt with a long wick before him, said, "If I had died, as I ought to have done, upon the wreck—if he had never been born, perhaps it would have been as well for both of us."



V.

AT AN AMATEUR THEATRE.

CHAPTER I.

EHERE were many regular playgoers in the world taking a great interest in all things theatrical, who yet had never heard tell of the Boudoir Theatre.

The Royal Boudoir—it was familiarly known as the Royal Bedroom—was inconveniently situated, as far as the general public was concerned, up a very unlikely-looking street in an unlikely quarter of the town. From the outside its appearance was not inviting, for it had something of the look of a small chapel out of repair. Persons passing of a night by the open door were often startled by solemn and sepulchral sounds, and those who stopped and—as was generally the case—finding the doorkeeper's back turned peeped in, most likely found the little stage occupied by an amateur of melancholy aspect, spouting blank verse to a select and dejected audience, who looked as if they had all made a mistake in coming, and would like to sneak away again if he would only take his eye off them.

Small playbills, very unlike the playbills at a regular theatre, were posted up outside the house, and remained there a long while after the evening to which they bore reference had passed away. The works of the Immortal Bard and other dramatic authors that cost nothing were generally selected for performance, and it was the habit of those who attended as spectators to give the preference to the legitimate drama, on account of the beauty of the lan-

guage, though it must be confessed the language was not quite what the poet left it when the amateur had done his little best.

The audience—except on special occasions—was a very shabby one, and it was difficult to say to what class of life the persons belonged. Most of the spectators were well acquainted with the actors on the stage, and applauded them loudly upon their entrance. The actors belonged to clubs. The bills said that it was the twelfth performance of the Kemble-Keans, or the fourteenth of the United Thespians, as the case might be, and the audience, with a recollection of by-gone triumphs, bade one another prepare for good things to come, for Bill This or Bob That was “first class” in such and such a character.

In their small way, then, some of these ladies and gentlemen had earned a reputation—had formed the subject of a biographical sketch in the *Amateur's Journal*, wherein the various performances were seriously criticised by the editor when he had time, or the amateurs themselves when he had not.

It was difficult to understand how some of these amateurs could be so lost to all perception of the fitness of things as to make an exhibition of their woeful shortcomings, for at times there were knock-kneed amateurs, and bandy-legged, and squinting, and one-eyed; but again, there were clever ones as well, and now and then one left his club and took his place upon the boards of a real theatre and got to be a public favourite.

As a rule the actors were during the day shopmen or clerks; the actresses came from warehouses or workrooms. Most of the former acted for fun; the latter had more often aspirations. In the far-off future they pictured great dramatic triumphs; delighted audiences, thunders of applause, bouquets from a private box, and a call at the end of the act; but they were for the most part doomed to disappointment, these unfortunates, for few had pretty faces or figures, without one of which the unreasonable British public does not take kindly to female talent, however great it may be.

As it is in other walks of life, woman was woman's worst enemy. The ladies in front sniggered at the ladies on the stage. In their turn those on the stage pooh-poohed the others' little efforts when they took the place of those before the float. They spoke always pityingly of one another.

"That poor dear Mountmorency. Her friends ought not to let her make such a fool of herself. Be quiet now, do. It's very unkind of you to laugh."

Have you ever at the real theatre noted the intense delight of the ballet if by ill-luck one of the première danseuse's petticoats gives way, or some similar misfortune befalls her? How they stand there smiling sweetly, but taking good care not to tell her of it, while she smiles sweetly also, all unconscious. When a young lady met with a similar misfortune at the Boudoir there was great tittering. During the course of the witty old comedies and screaming old farces, the mishaps of the performers caused the greater part of the laughter. When everything went well it was thought to be a dull evening, and for that reason the tragic plays of the Swan of Avon were preferred by the audience, who, talking over a performance afterwards, would say of "Othello" or "Hamlet," perhaps, "I laughed, Sir, till my sides ached. We all of us roared till we rolled off our seats."

There was one particular amateur, a large fat man with a tremendous voice, who enacted the Moor in a way so outrageously funny the whole house was on the broad grin from the time he entered the scene till he left it, and it was a thing never to be forgotten--the trick he had of slapping his thigh emphatically at the end of a telling speech, leaving the imprint of a hot black hand upon his white robe at every smack.

There was a melancholy long young man, who never could be induced to let the audience have more than a side view of him, and sometimes less than that--a russet boot and lanky leg alone being visible whilst he told his tale from behind a wing.

There were many who could not learn their parts, or forgot them in their fright when the time came, and these followed the prompter blindly, repeating the words as nearly as they could catch them, with now and then diverting variations wholly unintentional. Sometimes, too, arguments would arise between the prompter and the prompted, which mixed in oddly with the proper dialogue of the piece, and wholly personal matters were discussed, culminating once or twice in fisticuffs and nose-pulling, to the enormous delight of the spectators.

The stage was often kept waiting whilst these differences

among the company were settled behind. Then some of the characters would appear prematurely, and deliver speeches in haste, which bore reference to events that had not yet transpired. As the actors all paid for their parts, it not unfrequently happened that one of them, thinking he had not been allowed to do enough for his money, would remain upon the scene for some time after he should have made his exit. The introduction of laboriously comic gag was to be expected from this class of amateur, and it was not safe to trust him with a riding-whip or other offensive weapon, or pleasant to stand within his reach if he had one.

At all times the amateur crowd was extremely difficult to manage, owing not only to an undue rollicksomeness on the part of the crowders, but to the impossibility of any rollicking being done, in the limited space, without a leg or two going through the distant landscape. Some of these crowds—bands of lawless soldiery, red republicans, enthusiastic Irish peasantry, or the like—were pressed into the service only at the last moment, and though having but a vague notion of the cause of their assembling, were none the less excited upon that account. Therefore they occasionally hunted down and captured the wrong man, or rushing in at the wrong time, seized upon and overcame with unnecessary violence an unhappy amateur who had yet a long speech to deliver, of which they would not allow him to say a word before they dragged him off.

The proprietor of this abode of the Muses was named Toogood—an unimaginative fat man, who took the strange things he saw and heard in the course of his professional duties as a matter of course, and never exhibited any signs of liveliness under any circumstances whatever, except when he saw his property being destroyed, and then he was very lively indeed.

Mrs. Toogood was said to have about her the remains of a fine woman, and these remains were on a large scale, as regarded nose and bust, and symmetrical proportions generally. She had been a beauty in her time, and had trod the boards as Miss Molflander, "of the London theatres." In those days a wicked lord was said to have ineffectually cast his snares around her, but she had given her hand and heart to the Toogood of her affections, and leaving the stage when her figure began to leave her, instructed pupils and got up amateur performances at the Royal Boudoir.

Even now, upon rare and special occasions, Mrs. Toogood (Miss Molflander, in parenthesis) would deliver a short address, or give a recitation, which was always applauded to the echo. The editor of the *Amateur's Journal* before alluded to was one of the loudest and most persistent of the applauders.

"It's fine, Sir ; it's fine ; it's devilish fine !" the old gentleman said, with enthusiasm. "The old style, Sir ; the right style. I knew that woman when she was a girl, Sir. I was in the house, Sir, the first night she ever came out, at the little theatre in the Haymarket, Sir, in eighteen hundred and thirty-seven, when Sam Phelps played Shylock for the first time in London, and Molflander there was one of Portia's lady attendants. She was, Sir, begad !"

But Toogood was not of theatrical antecedents. He had simply kept a shoe-shop in his earlier days. He was a family connexion of Molflander. They had loved one another ever so many years, and in the end had got married. Then the shoe-shop was abandoned, and this speculation of the Boudoir Theatre entered upon. The wear and tear attendant upon the getting up of amateur performances and keeping peace between the amateurs would have been too much for an excitable temperament, but Toogood bore the worry very easily.

He took no interest whatever in the acting itself—at least from an actor's point of view. When the performance was short, he called it a nice light night. When it consisted, as not unfrequently happened, of two three-act pieces and a farce, he called the night "heavy." He professed to provide all necessary scenery, but his stock was limited. He had only two streets in his collection, and if a third were wanted, one of the two had to serve again. In the matter of properties he was unreliable. He had been known to supply a pincushion instead of the live hen in the "vendetta" scene in the *Corsican Brothers*. His banquets were unusually unreal ; his practicable doors and windows of an unmanageable character. His rustic bridge was a structure of so rickety a nature that it imperilled the limbs of the venturesome ; and his mossy bank—an unmistakable egg-chest painted green and ridiculously angular—was a thing which only the experienced could sit upon without incurring an unseemly upset.

Sometimes, when an actor was pulling or pushing at a

door or window, wishing to get in or out, as the case might be, a voice from the side would be heard to say, "Shove it the other way, can't you?" This was Toogood's voice, and, acting upon the suggestion, the actor shoved the other way, and after shaking the whole edifice to its foundation effected his purpose.

It was a wonderful sight to see the simple Toogood in the midst of this unreal world, so cool and composed, when all others were breathless with excitement. He in his shirt sleeves and apron jostled by silks and satins. They rushing on and off the stage, giving hasty directions, snatching hurriedly at the properties wanted for the next scene. He phlegmatically receiving these directions without changing a muscle, to forget all about them the next moment, handing out wrong properties, or repudiating all knowledge of such articles being required, seeming to have but one aim and object in life, the changing of the scenery as soon as might be, whether the scene were acted out or not.

And thus nightly the amateurs fretted their little hour upon the stage of the Royal Boudoir. Presently a new aspirant to histrionic honours joined their ranks, with whom we are already acquainted.

"I say, Toogood," said one day, in his off-hand style, Mr. Harry Draper of the Temple; "I say, can we give another performance here?"

"We've a lot of things on," replied Mr. Toogood; "two very heavy nights next week, but you know I'm always very happy to have your company here, Sir. As Mrs. Toogood says, your real gentlemen it's a pleasure to serve. If they want a thing done well they don't mind payin' a fair price."

"We won't grumble about the money, I dare say," replied Draper, "but the thing must be well done; you understand. You'll have to screw up that confounded rustic bridge a little bit. We don't want to have anything to say to the mossy bank, and you'll most likely have to get a lot of new props—a ship, with guns to fire, and a life-sized elephant."

But this Toogood knew to be the gentleman's fun. Had he really seriously made a point of the elephant, Toogood would have promised it most faithfully, and when the last moment arrived, as likely as not would have argued that an allusion to its being off at the side would be quite as effective as its actual appearance.

“Say it’s behind,” was one of Toogood’s favourite suggestions. If a shot ought to have been fired and was not, “Pretend you heard it.” Once, when the night came, he was unprovided with either scenery or properties for a whole act. “Say it’s happened,” he coolly observed, “and go on to the next.”





CHAPTER II.

N the heat of her anger, Ann felt that she was quite justified in acting in the way she had done towards William Bradshaw. Upon reflection, however, she had her doubts.

She did not love him—never had done so, she thought now. She did not believe that he loved her. How could he, lecturing her as he did, and complaining of her every word and act. At any rate they were wholly unsuited to each other. It was much better that the match should be broken off. But then they had been engaged so long.

How could she break it off now, when it had been arranged for them all these years and years. It is true that it was broken off in a fashion by the quarrel, but then would he believe that she was really in earnest? When he came to think it over, would not he rather suppose that she had spoken hastily, and come next day to ask for an explanation of her conduct? In that case what could she do else but make it up with him again?

Mrs. Whitaker took this view of the case when she discussed the subject with her daughter. She had one question to ask, and would feel obliged if an answer were given her. If Ann did not marry William, whom else did she expect to marry?

Ann could not point to any probable husband. She ventured to suggest that there might be some one or other who might marry her even if William were lost. She also said that she was young enough yet awhile.

“Young enough!” cried Mrs. Whitaker. “How you

talk ! When I was your age I had been married a year at least. As it is, your engagement with William has been going on much too long. You shall write to him at once."

"Write to him, mamma !"

"Certainly. This very evening."

Ann did not argue the point. The artful puss perhaps supposed that it might be the surest way to gain her own ends if she allowed her mamma to think that she had carried the day. She thought, too, perhaps the old lady might forget to speak any more upon the subject that evening, and thus at least some time would be gained.

But in this idea she was wrong. Mrs. Whitaker again and again returned to the subject.

"Yes, decidedly you must write to him, and tell him how sorry you are for what you have said."

"I'm not sorry, mamma," Ann replied, at last losing patience.

"Not sorry !"

"No."

"Then you ought to be, that's all I've got to say."

"But I'm not, and I will not tell him that I am. It is all his fault."

"Hush, Miss, hush ! How dare you !"

Ann made no reply. It was, however, evident that she meant to be rebellious. Mrs. Whitaker sat reflecting, the famous half-mended stocking lying neglected in her lap.

"If you had another offer well and good," she said, presently. "Really, William is a little trying sometimes. He has no business to take the tone he does towards us."

"He would be only too happy to break off the engagement," said Ann.

Mrs. Whitaker suddenly veered round again.

"No, he wouldn't, Miss. You know nothing about it. It is your bad temper alone that has led to what has happened. It is very wicked of you. I wonder how you can. But I see it all. It is those stupid tale-books, and plays, and nonsense you get hold of. What's that you've got in your hand now? Put it down this instant and find some needlework."

Half an hour later the old lady continued in another strain—

"I can't think why on earth James should take it into his head to stop out all the afternoon and evening, just when

he is wanted, too. I should like to consult him on the subject. I don't think it would be right to send a letter to William before consulting James. You see James is very well off—in a good position. Indeed I think he is much better off than William is ever likely to be for all his preaching. And he is extremely sensible. If it were James, now, instead of William."

"Mamma, how can you? As if it were likely! James does not dream of such a thing. You would never think of saying the least word that would let him suppose we had ever spoken on the subject. I should die of shame if you did. Besides, I do not love him—never could—except as a brother. I do love him as a brother. He is very, very kind to us."

Mrs. Whitaker's dignity was ruffled by this appeal.

"I should hope, Ann, you will give your mother credit for not being *quite* a fool. I should hope so. Do you suppose I have no proper pride? Besides, of course I can see quite plainly what prompts James's kindness. It is quite humiliating enough, my dear, without your pointing it out, thank you. If your father had not been so foolishly obstinate we should never have been in this position, beholden for our daily food to another's charity. I am sure when I think of it my meals almost choke me."

She wiped her eyes and whimpered for a few moments, then rang for supper.

"There, put away your needlework, do, and let us have a game at cribbage; it will pass the time away."

After supper, James still remaining absent, Mrs. Whitaker declared her intention of acting promptly on her own account. She fetched her desk, unscrewed the inkstand, chose a new pen, spread out her paper, and began composing.

Several times she paused to ask Ann how certain words were spelt, and upon other occasions, with varying success, searched for them herself in the dictionary. The rough draught of the letter at length completed, a fair copy was made, and then another, and finally the approved copy put into an envelope and sealed with elaboration and an unintentional "kiss."

Before closing the envelope, however, Ann was asked whether she would like to see it.

"I hope, mamma, you will not send the letter at all ; I am determined not to marry him."

"How dare you, Miss?" cried her mamma. "I am determined that you shall."

It was settled that the letter should be posted the first thing in the morning, after James had been consulted. James did not return until after the ladies had retired, letting himself in with a latch-key. Instead of going to bed like a reasonable creature then, he sat before the dying fire and smoked a series of pipes. No wonder that his rest was broken after such excesses. Mrs. Whitaker more than once during the night heard him wandering up and down his room.

Mrs. Whitaker's rest was broken also. She arose later than she had intended, and the letter she had written consequently did not go away by the first post.

The first post in, however, brought her a letter, which materially altered her plans. It was from William, and ran thus :—

"MY DEAR AUNT,

"Your daughter has doubtlessly communicated to you the result of an interview which passed between us this morning. I regret that our friendly relations should terminate thus disagreeably ; but it is a consolation to me to reflect that the blame is not upon my side, and that I can at least lay my hand upon my heart and say I have acted fairly and honourably throughout.

"It is not for me to blame Ann, or to point out to you what possible advantages our union would have possessed. Your daughter has chosen for herself : the past is irrevocable.

"After what has occurred, I need hardly say that all communication between us it would be advisable should cease. It is a source of comfort to me to know that you have found new and rich friends, and that when rejecting my assistance and co-operation, you will not, for a time at least, suffer in a pecuniary sense.

"As to any debt that may be owing to me from you, I beg that you will look upon it as cancelled.

"In conclusion, my dear aunt, I must once more express my sorrow that this should have occurred. I will not speak

of my own sufferings, and the way I have been treated ; there is One only who knoweth all things, and when the time cometh shall judge us upon our merits.

“I am, yours obediently,

“WILLIAM BRADSHAW.”

The first thing Mrs. Whitaker did when she had read this letter was to tear up the one she herself had written into very small pieces. Then she re-read William’s epistle, and was very angry indeed. The bell rang loudly, and Ann was fetched.

“Look here, my dear—look here, if you please. Did you ever read anything so—so insolent. Talking of my debt too—that ten pounds I suppose he means ; but he shall have it back, every farthing of it, this very day. Give me my purse off the dressing-table.”

The purse in question contained only seven pounds ten shillings, half of which sum was wrapped up in a butcher’s bill it had been intended to settle, according to promise, that day. But there was James, was there not ? He would not allow his aunt to be so insulted.

When James was presented with the letter above printed, he read it through very carefully folded it up, and handed it back without a word.

“Well ?” said Mrs. Whitaker.

“That’s William, is it ?” he asked.

“Of course it is.”

“Ah ! I don’t seem to care so much about renewing his acquaintance as I did. On the whole I’m not sorry we missed one another.”

“The tone he takes,” said Mrs. Whitaker ; “the way he talks to us, as if we were I don’t know what—the dust under his feet ; and the way he makes himself out to be all that’s good, and us all that isn’t. That was his way always ; he always took the upper hand with us all, and we were that meek and lowly—I can’t think why. Sam was too. I’ve known your uncle ask William’s pardon for saying ‘damn it’ before him.”

“I can’t say I like William—on paper,” observed James, reflectively. “I should like to hear him in the pulpit though. I’ll go next Sunday.”

“It’s more than I shall,” said Mrs. Whitaker, warmly. “I’ve had enough of his chapels, and his tea-drinkings, and

his Mrs. Hodsons, and the rest of it—quite enough, thank you kindly. There's a limit to everything. I mayn't be as humble as I ought to be, and I'm sorry for it ; but kissing the rod wouldn't satisfy some folks unless you kissed every individual twig of it."

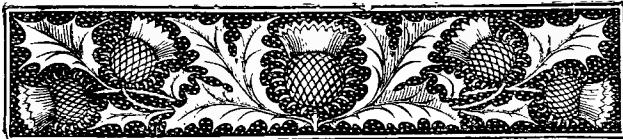
"Of course after what has passed, as he says, all communication should cease between you."

"That's easy to say, of course ; but how can I submit to such insult? That he should have spoken in that way about ten pounds ! It is true that it is a large sum to some people who are poorly off, but to others—oh, it's disgraceful of him!"

¶ "Don't let that bother you," said James ; and it is only fair to the old lady to add that from that time forth the ten pounds did not bother her at all.

"I suppose he'll send it back again," James said ; but in this he was wrong.





CHAPTER III.

ANOTHER entertainment was given at the Royal Boudoir by those distinguished amateurs who had taken part in the celebrated *Don Cæsar* performance already recorded.

These entertainments were not quite of the same class as those ordinarily given by the amateurs who used Toogood's little Theatre. These were "Distinguished" amateurs, and this adjective was in some measure a term of reproach to the more lowly Thespians. The aspiring shop-boys could be rather jealous of them ; when they were obtained admission on the night of the performance and cheered derisively.

The Distinguished called the other set "Cads :" the Cads called the Distinguished "Duffers." Mr. Toogood liked the Duffers ; they paid much better. They were rather troublesome to manage about the shortcomings of the properties, yet they were to be managed ; and as the money was forthcoming it was as well to strain a point and indulge them.

The ladies assisting the Distinguished were not from the same class as those who played for the Cads. Some of the Cad companies prided themselves upon being working men, and had working girls to play for them ; but the Distinguished hired real actresses, or professional amateur ladies.

These latter were not exactly real actresses, but yet recognised by the organs of the profession, and their efforts were uniformly praised in the reports of the doings at the

Boudoir. They were the Misses Flo Spanglass, Joey Fitz, and Bel Bouncington, whose advertisements the curious may have read with wonder. "Miss Flo Spanglass attends amateur histrionic entertainments, military and otherwise. Land's End, 1st proximo ; Duncansby Head, 2nd ; other dates vacant. All letters respecting further engagements to be addressed to Miss F. S., at her private residence, No. 5, Aspasia Villas, St. John's Wood."

Miss Flo it was who took a prominent part in the fancy fairs organised in aid of the almshouses for superannuated supernumeraries—"the broken sticks," as they were termed. She was pretty and clever ; but for some unexplained reason had only had one regular engagement, six weeks or so, during Christmas time, at the Great Sahara. It was supposed that she made a much better thing of it by amateur acting. She wore many rings, bracelets, chains, and other ornaments, and her terms were generally supposed to be expensive. Only the most daring spirits had ventured to offer her an engagement at a low price : others she had accepted only after swearing all concerned to solemn secrecy.

As for the Distinguished themselves, they belonged, as may be judged by the examples given, to the upper classes of society. There were a couple of captains, an honourable, a young lord even. They acted for charities, and charged their friends large sums for the privilege of seeing them do it.

There was sometimes quite a run upon the front seats, and extra front seats had to be improvised. Members of a military band performed in the orchestra. Miss Flo and Co. were engaged at large salaries. There were refreshments of a choice character always to be had in the green-room, and the entertainment was generally followed by a supper. After deducting working expenses, the balance to be handed over to the charity was not, as a rule, a very large one.

Mrs. Whitaker, and Ann, and James were invited to the next performance, and had free admissions presented to them. Henry Draper asked Ann to take a part in one of the plays. "Not this time," she said ; and he obtained a promise from her that she would certainly act with him next time.

If anything, this second evening was a greater success

than that, the particulars of which have been already given. Everybody was highly delighted and amused, more particularly the Distinguished amateurs themselves who had taken part in it.

James, in that dry way of his—nobody ever distinctly understood whether he was in jest or earnest—wanted to know whether it was as good fun as a tea-drinking. Mrs. Whitaker was a little outraged at this. She did not think that such a comparison should be made; but she was not, somehow, nearly as severe in her opinions as heretofore.

If anything, Harry Draper surpassed himself. He acted, as usual, an heroical character—a hero brave and noble. His handsome face, bright smile, and graceful figure kept all eyes—ladies' eyes at any rate—riveted upon him; more than one heart fluttered tremulously as its owner watched him through her tears, and listened spell-bound to the beautiful sentiments he was uttering in the best blank verse. And how unworthy of him, they all agreed, was the lady of his choice, for whom he had suffered so much and so bravely.

In the afterpiece he also appeared, and this time played the part of a gay Lothario, in russet boots. It is doubtful whether the ladies did not admire him most in this character. Here he was again with the same handsome face—handsomer on account of some becoming ringlets—the same musical voice and deep thrilling tones, only his sentiments were highly reprehensible.

It seemed at first quite sad to think that that very good-looking young man could have turned so wild; and yet what a persuasive way the rascal had with him! What dreadfully good-looking, diverting dogs some of you naughty men are! Don't you think so yourselves?

"Oh, was it not beautiful!" Ann cried, when the curtain descended.

Harry Draper, abandoning the triumphs yet in store for him had he stopped to supper, accompanied the ladies home to Straggleton New Town, and there supped upon some little delicacies James Jarman had ordered to be sent in for their refreshment.

"Were you really amused?" Draper asked. He had made the enquiry once or twice before.

"Oh, so much!" replied Ann, in a low tone, full of

gratitude and deep admiration. "And I was very frightened, too, at one part ; it was dreadful."

"You mean where the fellow was coming in to stick me at the roadside inn. What a make up that was of the captain's, wasn't it ?"

"Oh, he horrified me, and—and I could not help thinking it was real. Was I not foolish ?"

"You thought he would hurt me, did you ?"

"Yes ; and how well you acted ! Did not he, James ?—was not the scene dreadful ?"

"I thought it was beautifully acted," said James. "It put me a little in mind of something that occurred to me once somewhere in California."

"California !" echoed Mrs. Whitaker ; "have you been there, among other places ? It seems to me you've been all round the world."

"A great traveller !" said Harry Draper, with a slight suspicion of irony in his tone ; "and what did my humble effort remind you of ? Do tell us."

"No ; it's not worth telling."

"Do, James," said Mrs. Whitaker ; and they all pressed him.

James coloured up a little, and crumbled a piece of bread as he spoke.

"Oh, bother it ; I wish I had not spoken. Well, then, I was lying all night in a log-hut—a sort of roadside inn or shanty—and the proprietor, a cut-throat ruffian, and a negro, a sort of servant of his, crept in on me, as the man did on you to-night. I luckily overheard them planning the business, and more luckily still, only one came in at a time, and came in the dark."

"Yes ; but is that all ? What did you do ?" Ann asked, eagerly.

"I'm not very strong, you know, and I don't think I'm any pluckier than I need be ; but of course I saw I should be settled if I did not struggle for it ; I could gain nothing by not using my knife."

But here he paused again, as though the story were concluded.

Ann asked in a tremble, and looking at him with great eyes—

"Did you use your knife ?"

"Yes," said James ; "I took the first by surprise. He

died without a cry ; but I stabbed him several times to make sure. Then I stood flat up against the wall by the door, and waited for the other. Of course I had to do the same by him, or I should not be here to tell the story."

There was a little silence after this anecdote. The theatrical hero looked at the real hero across the table with a little distrust. Ann almost shivered when presently the slight white hand of this traveller of terrible experience handed her a harmless bread-and-butter knife for which she had occasion.





CHAPTER IV

HE [third entertainment of the Rough Club was shortly to take place, and Ann had promised to take part in it. Some eccentric geniuses, more or less literary and artistic, had organised a club in the neighbourhood of the Strand, and called themselves the *Roughs*—hence the name of the amateur theatrical company performing at the Royal Boudoir. The members of the former club composed the latter, with the exception of the ladies, whose services were engaged for the evening only.

So great had been the success attending the former entertainments, it was resolved that at this should be put forth all the strength of the club, and a new and original play, written by one of the Roughs, was that night to be first performed.

It was a well-written play, and in parts very witty ; but the characters generally had a good deal too much to say for themselves. Nor could this easily be avoided, for everybody wished to have as much to say as possible, and each person desired to have the last word — an arrangement which threw considerable difficulty in our author's way, and appeared impossible to effect, unless the comedy should conclude with a chorus or a shout.

Before he had done with this company, little Addleton and his comedy had suffered much, the latter being seriously mutilated. He began by calling it “*Couleur de Rose* ;” but this French title was at once objected to. “*Rose Colour*” was not thought to be a sufficiently apt translation. “*Life*

Through "Rose-coloured Spectacles" was rather long and clumsy ; besides, the principal character, the one who took a rosy view of things, did not wear spectacles.

"Why shouldn't he ?" asked one amateur.

"Because he is a young man."

"Why not make an old man of him ?"

"Because I should have to rewrite the whole piece."

"Why not rewrite it ?"

Draper's friend, Tom Yolland, came to the rescue with—"Look Always on the Sunny Side." This was thought rather too long also ; something short and crisp was wanted ; why not "The Sunny Side ?"

"You see, so much of the point lies in one of my characters repeating the words 'couleur de rose,'". Addleton explained. "I have made him a Frenchman for that very reason, and taken a great deal of trouble in consequence."

"There's no novelty in a Frenchman speaking broken English," another amateur observed ; but the amateur who was cast for the Frenchman's character, and who firmly believed he was going to make a great hit with the dialogue, loudly protested against any alteration.

At least half a dozen rehearsals took place before any name was decided upon, and little Addleton was well-nigh worried out of his life by the various suggestions ; finally, it was called "Making the best of it," which was the best that could be made of it under the circumstances.

It was a difficult task to make matters pleasant with the ladies. Harry Draper had insisted that Ann should be the heroine : the author, not being very sanguine respecting the talents of an unknown person, objected with all his might ; but Draper threatened to throw up his part unless he had his way. Draper was the author's great hope, and of course he must be humoured.

But the talented Miss Flo Spanglass was very angry. What next? she asked. Was she to play second to a nobody-knows-who ? Not she, indeed ! She only engaged for leading business. She would rather have nothing to do with the thing at all.

Poor little Addleton made a pilgrimage to St. John's Wood, and begged and entreated. He promised that Miss Flo's part, though nominally the second, should be really the first. He would cram it with jokes. He took away the copy he had given her, and sat up all night poking puns

into its sentences ; but next day when he called upon her and read aloud the results of his labour, she received his choicest witticisms with icy coldness.

"Puns are no good," she said ; "I want a song and dance."

"But it is high comedy," he gasped.

"High or low, I can't help that. Come now, there's a dear little man, put them in somewhere or let me do so. Take it home again and think it over."

Little Addleton often said that never in his life before had he worked so hard, and on this occasion he was giving his labours gratuitously. In a usual way he wrote magazine articles, and was very popular with magazine proprietors. The public knew something about him. The lucky accident of his name beginning with an A led to its figuring always at the top of lists of contributors. There was very little to choose between him and Brown and Cooper ; it would have been hard to say which was the best or worst of the trio ; but alphabetically Addleton got the advantage, and it was many pounds in his pocket. The O's, P's, and Q's were passed over unnoticed in the long list of "best authors of the day."

With Toogood, little Addleton had a deal of trouble. The number of miscellaneous articles required in every scene was, Toogood said, "out of all reason."

"There's five pound worth of props. wanted," he said to his good lady. "A working moon, if you please, and stormy waves ! What a pack of nonsense, when twenty words would do much better if the character pointed off while he talked."

Ann was excited by the thoughts of what was to come ; she could neither sleep nor eat. She was going to act in public. She was to wear white satin and stage diamonds, and have her hair powdered. How beautiful she would look.

Before her looking-glass she rehearsed the effect, using her violet powder for the purpose. "Gracious goodness me !" cried Mrs. Whitaker ; "what's the girl done to herself!"

She was quite perfect in her part twenty-four hours after it was given to her, for she thought of nothing else. She repeated it to herself, and to herself in the looking-glass, and some of it to her mamma.

"My lord, I am a poor gentleman's daughter!" (this was in an early part of the play, previous to the white satin). "Yonder, peeping through the trees, is the only home I have known. That thatch roof covers all on earth that I hold dear. A poor place enough, you may think, scarce worth while turning from the high road to go look at, but I have been very, very happy there, and on my bended knees each night I give my heartfelt thanks to Heaven."

"Lor', how touching!" Mrs. Whitaker observed, the first time she heard this pretty sentence. Little Addleton had taken great pains with its composition, although it may not strike the critical reader as being particularly brilliant.

The lord the poor gentleman's daughter thus addressed was, you may be sure, a wicked one. A false-hearted, fascinating nobleman, impersonated by that celebrated amateur actor, Harry Draper, otherwise Le Mesurier. The celebrated Harry would insist upon being wicked. This was his particular line, and he found it very popular with his fashionable audience, who applauded him loudly on his entrance and exit, and even received his naughtiest remarks with great favour.

At the performances of the Cad companies, now, this was not the case, any more than it is at a real theatre. Though the villains were not hissed, as at the latter, the right-minded among the audience regretted that the actor should throw away his talents in such a cause.

"It's such a pity he should do those characters."

The villains of the real theatres, it is well known, bring away with them a bad name when they leave the stage life for the domestic. There were many thousands of honest people who shuddered at the recollection of O. Smith, "that dreadful man!"

Two simple country folks went to the play, and saw *Virginius*. It was a fine performance, they agreed, and very cutting in parts. The most heartrending scene, however, was where the man killed his daughter; "but that was all brought about by that beggar Jones" (the heavy villain). "He's always at some mischief or other, he is. I sha'n't support him at his benefit if he has one. So I tell him!"

You may be certain Mrs. Whitaker had a great deal to say about the theatricals. At first she was not at all sure it was the right thing for Ann to take a part. To play before

a houseful of people ! To be made love to in public ! No, it could not be thought of for an instant.

James, however, persuaded her that it was all right, and if James said so of course it must be.

"But then she can't be going to and fro alone to the rehearsals."

"I'll take care of her."

Therefore when Mrs. Whitaker could not go, which frequently was the case, in consequence of a severe cold she caught from one of the thousand and one draughts of the Boudoir Theatre, James accompanied his cousin and saw her safe home again.

"You've brought your body-guard, as usual, I see," observed Draper. "He seems to have got a deal more time on his hands than he knows what to do with. You're quite right to make him useful."

"He's very kind to mamma and me. I don't think I could ever find any one else as kind."

"He seems to mean well. He don't say much, but I suppose he thinks all the more. Couldn't you persuade him, though, to buy a differently shaped hat ?"

"What fun you make of every one. Please don't talk like that. I don't like to hear anything against James."

"No, no ; I beg your pardon. What right have I to speak at all. It is easy enough to see whom he is in love with and who loves him."

"You know it is not so, Harry. How can you say such a thing."

"I don't know. I'm a fool, I suppose. What does it matter to me ! Why should I dream of impossible happiness ? Ah, if you knew the story of my wretched life."

"Your wretched life ! Tell me——"

"Lord Ladyslay," called out little Addleton, excitedly. "Do, please, Draper, listen to what's going on. You ought to be on now. If it isn't done to the moment all the effect will be spoilt. Look here now, somebody, please. Don't all go away. We must have that scene over again."

There was not the slightest foundation for this statement respecting the wretchedness of Mr. Draper's past life. He was always heaving sighs over perfectly imaginary griefs. He was always acting a part. He was the Corsair of the Middle Temple ! As well as it could be understood by

those who gave some time and trouble to deciphering his character, he seemed to wish it to be vaguely supposed that he had terrible crimes upon his conscience—that he had led a wild and reckless life, and the blighting of happy homes lay heavy upon his soul. But this was all fiddle-de-dee from beginning to end.

Tom Yolland, that friend of his who shared his rooms, noticed some of the by-play at the wing during the rehearsals, and questioned Draper upon the subject.

“What the deuce are you about with that girl? Her eyes follow you as though you had her purse in your pocket and she was afraid you would try to run away unless she kept a sharp look-out on your movements.”

“Poor girl!” said Harry, in his most tragic tone. “Poor girl! But what am I to do?”

“Well, I don’t know, I’m sure,” said Tom Yolland.

There came on about this time a period of mystery and bewilderment, in which nobody exactly knew what anybody else meant or was driving at, when all day long it was as it is in some melodramas at the transpontine and provincial theatres. Anon, anon. Let us bide our time; we must dissemble and—— Hush, we are observed.





CHAPTER V

SOMETIMES Mrs. Whitaker could not help asking herself what William would say to this amateur business if he knew of it, and she felt occasionally ill at ease.

William's opinions had always been violently antagonistic to things theatrical. Poor Samuel, too, although he was professionally engaged at the Great Sahara, had a pious horror of those who trod the boards rouged and bewigged. He maintained that pure-minded women and children had no business at the play. What did they hear there but lies and bad language.

Some people arguing the case with the late Mr. Whitaker, asserted that only the best of morals were inculcated by stage representations, pantomimes excepted ; that virtue was always rewarded and vice always punished ; that the lower you descended in search of the dramatic element, the more triumphant virtue was, and the worse punishment awaited the vicious. Strange as it might appear, in the regular right down bad neighbourhoods the morals were more strict, the villain more deeply execrated, the virtue of the heroine above price, more intently admired, and her welfare watched over with a more anxious solicitude.

It did one good, the supporters of the drama protested, to see the pure and guileless coster in his threepenny gallery, following with a childish admiration as much of the moral sentiments as he could understand, applauding loudly those to whom he thought applause was due, and loading with contumely the baffled ruffians of high estate.

Gradually Mrs. Whitaker's prejudices gave way. At first it was only amateur performances she could countenance ; but one night James brought home "dress circles," and the ladies accompanied him to see a pantomime. There was not any person present, old or young, who laughed half as long or loudly at the clown's nonsense — very dreary nonsense, by-the-way, as it generally is now-a-days.

Long after, the bare recollection of this person's comicalities caused Mrs. Whitaker to burst out laughing, and she gave hazy accounts of what she had seen to Harry Draper, Mrs. Pickering, Hannah the servant even, all of whom politely agreed with her that it must have been very funny indeed, though they did not distinctly see where the fun of the thing lay from her description.

Ann did not approve of the clowning to the same extent as her mamma. She did not care much for that sort of thing. Already this young lady had got her notions. She wanted to copy Nature—to act her part as a person so placed in real life might have done. She once argued a point with Little Addleton.

Little Addleton wished her in one of the scenes "to take the stage" with tragic stride whilst giving utterance to certain sentiments of a high-flown character. Though professing herself an incompetent judge of the suitableness of the words employed, she altogether protested against the "business." The business meant taking the stage ; or in other words, crossing from wing to wing with a tragical action.

Little Addleton was staggered by her objections, and gave way. He generally did so. Several times during each rehearsal he had to knuckle under to the great Flo Spanglass, who had a way of beginning her objections with—"Oh, I say, Mr. Addleton, this sort of thing won't do at all, you know," which filled our author's heart with forebodings of coming evil.

There was only one person in all the caste who did not stand out for sweeping alterations, and he who took things quietly did not learn his part at all, but gagged every scene when the night came.

The preparation of Ann's toilet was a work of time. There were journeys and journeys between Straggleton New Town and the costumiers in Bow Street. The white satin was tried and retried, and James acted most un-

commercially in the transaction by saying upon all occasions that no expense need be spared.

In the end, however, the effect was very striking. Ann was early at the theatre: only one other person had arrived—Little Addleton, who looked worn and weary.

"That's right," he cried when he saw her. "You're here, anyhow. You'll do your best, Miss Mortimer, won't you? (Mortimer was her theatrical name.) I've asked some great guns to be here to-night. Jason Burgoyne, the author and actor, you know, and Jones from the Strand. Unluckily, there's a ben on somewhere that Jones has got to play at. Altogether he has to appear in three pieces at his own and the other theatre. However, he said he would look in if he had time."

Three of the gentlemen arrived. One sat down directly, and began learning his part. Little Addleton looked at him uneasily.

"Do try and stick to the words as much as you can, old fellow," said he.

"I'm all right," the other replied. "I'm perfect in the cues, at any rate."

"He's a perfect cue-er, he means to say," said Miss Flo Spanglass, who arrived at this moment. "Look here, you dear little man," she continued, to the author, "there's something wrong about this song after all. Suppose I leave it out, now, and put in one of my old favourites."

Several other amateurs arrived after this; but one of the principal ones was absent. Report said he had a dreadful cold in his head.

The performances were to begin with an original address to be spoken by the absentee. After the overture had been played over twice—the audience beginning to get a little restive meanwhile—somebody else read the address, and then there was an interval of intense excitement, in which messengers were despatched right and left in search of the missing man.

This individual came at last after a second apology had been made on his account, and then poor little Addleton's comedy proceeded somewhat smoothly. Of course there were many shortcomings with respect to properties, and some portion of the action was in consequence rather difficult to follow: but the dialogue was generally allowed to be witty, and frequent laughter and applause resulted.

In the first scene Ann looked very well, but was not quite loud enough. This was not to be wondered at in a *débutante*.

"Speak up," said Little Addleton. "Don't be afraid."

In the next scene Ann had to act with Harry Draper. She had rehearsed this part with him a dozen times at least. She acted it with all her heart—all her soul. At some points it was scarcely acting. Her supple form and soft flowing drapery fell naturally into a score of graceful shapes—her fair arms clung to him. There were a good many among the audience who would have given a trifle to have that young head resting on their breasts.

The curtain descended on Act I. Hitherto the piece had been very successful. The audience, as is usual at amateur entertainments, were kindly disposed, and finding something that was really not bad, were quite enthusiastic in their applause.

In Act II. the satin dress was to be worn—some deeply thrilling love passages were to occur. All little Addleton's strength lay in this portion of the drama.

The first scene opened with a love passage between Ann and her virtuous lover. He took his departure. She looked off after him with tearful eyes. She owed him a debt of gratitude. She gave him her promise that she would be his, and she would keep that promise come what might.

The wicked lover came—Harry Draper, in a travelling cloak and jack boots. He threw aside the cloak, and discovered the most becoming of riding dresses—green and gold. He poured forth his love-tale in low earnest tones. He entreated her to fly with him. He vowed that his love was eternal. The pleading voice seemed to draw her to him. How could she resist?

A great actress (was it Miss O'Neill?) thus defined the difference between John Kemble and Edmund Kean:

"If I had been Juliet when Kemble played Romeo, I think in the end I should have helped him up to the balcony. If it had been Kean making love, I could not have helped myself. I must have jumped off the balcony to him.

It is a great art that of making love either on or off the stage, and how few men do it well! Women as a rule make every allowance for the love-sick bunglers. Their confusion and clumsiness are in a measure flattering. One might imagine

the noonday sun would wax wrath if a bold-eyed mortal stared him out of countenance without blinking.

Harry Draper made love nearly as well as Fechter, or Dominick Murray. How could she resist him? She could not, and would not, had not the exigencies of the drama necessitated some procrastination.

An approaching footstep startled them. Harry sprang out of the window. The poor gentleman (Ann's father) entered. He kissed her and bade her good-night. Left alone in the quaint Gothic chamber, she whiled away the time by soliloquising before a mirror.

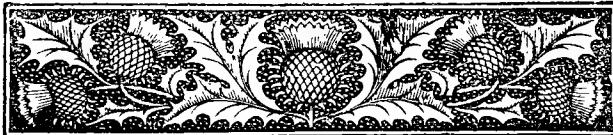
The moon rose and shone through the lattice window, its beams falling upon her face and the white satin dress she wore. What was going to happen now? The hushed audience in a tremble of excitement waited anxiously.

All at once a dark figure appeared upon the scene, advanced rapidly, and caught the heroine by the wrist. Some hurried words passed between them, but in a tone too low for those in front to catch, and then the dark figure was seen dragging the heroine from the stage, and she suffered him to do so without resistance.

Then a great hubbub arose in front, and some called "Shame" and some "Encore," and there were laughter and applause and sibilation. For the dark figure was attired in modern clothes unlike the dresses of the other characters—wearing a broadish brimmed hat, a white neckerchief, and black gloves, and in one hand he brandished an umbrella.

It was William Bradshaw who had thus broken in upon the performance of little Addleton's comedy, and who, during a moment when the author, Draper, and the stage-manager were temporarily absent from the stage, seized on, and carried off the heroine, whom he took away speechless and helpless in a cab.

Five minutes afterwards there was such an uproar in the Boudoir Theatre as never occurred within its walls before or since.



CHAPTER VI.

FOR the length of two or more streets the cab travelled before Ann had sufficiently recovered her senses to make any effort at resistance. The attack had been so bold, so sudden, there had been no fighting against it.

She had always been somewhat afraid of William. She had dreaded his hearing of the theatricals, to which she knew him to be greatly averse. His appearance at that moment, when no one was by to help her, had for a time deprived her of all presence of mind. But as the distance increased between her and the theatre, the full force of the absurdity of her position appeared to her.

Was she a child to be treated thus? Was it possible that such an outrage could be perpetrated in a free country, et cetera?

"How dare you act this way?" she cried. "Stop the cab. Let me out!"

She turned to open the window, but he held her wrist.

"How dare you?" he said. "How dare you degrade and disgrace yourself and me and all belonging to you? If you had not that paint upon your face you must blush, unless you are indeed lost to all sense of shame!"

She struggled to free her hands, but he held them tightly. She could have cried with rage.

"What do you mean by speaking to me in such a way?" she asked, in a broken voice. "Do you think I care for your stupid, bigoted notions? I will be an actress if I choose. Others far wiser than you wish me to go upon the stage, and I am decided now. I will! I swear it."

"Hush! hush! You cannot mean what you say. I thank Heaven I came in time to save you from further humiliation. I hope that the mummeries had not been going on long."

"Stop the cab, will you, or I will scream for help! I want to go back. I *will* go back."

"No, you shall not do that, Ann. I will take you home to your mother. It is without her knowledge that this has occurred. I am sure of that."

"You are quite wrong there," Ann retorted. "She is at the theatre, among the audience, and so is James."

William seemed a little staggered by this intelligence. His brows were knit, and his handsome face wore a savage and determined expression she had never seen on it before.

"Are you speaking the truth?" he asked.

"Yes, I am."

"Then if your mother is incapable of taking charge of you, I must do so in her place. I will take you home, and we will wait there until they return."

"No, no," said Ann, losing all control over herself, and bursting into a paroxysm of tears. "I will not bear it. Help! help!"

The cabman stopped abruptly. Ann cried again for help. "Hollo," said the man, "what's amiss?"

"Let me out—let me out!"

"Drive on," cried William. But the cab remained stationary. Some passers-by halted on the pavement and listened in wonder.

"I aint going to be a party to anythink o' this sort," the cabman said. "What's it all mean, if you please? You're a parson, aint you? What's your game with the young woman?"

"Do as I order you," said William, in a trembling voice. "Drive on. I am a relation of this young lady. She is under my charge."

"It is not true," Ann protested. "Let me out. Help! help! will nobody help me?"

The crowd, greatly augmented, pressed round the door. It was a narrow street, and the cab blocked up the road in consequence of a van being drawn up against the pavement just ahead. The driver of a brougham in front was calling out impatiently for the cab to move out of the

way. A gentleman in the brougham looked out and asked what was the matter.

Various members of the crowd volunteered information.

"A parson running away with a gal in white satin."

"A play-acting woman."

"She's got her hair all over whitening, she has; and she's covered all over with diamings, she is."

The description interested the gentleman in the brougham, who himself had a professional air about him. He alighted hurriedly.

"Can I be of any assistance?"

Already Ann had opened the door and sprung out. It was raining briskly. The streets were very dirty. The train of the famous white satin trailed in the mud.

"Oh, thank you," she said. "I want to go back to the theatre. I am an actress, and this—this fanatic has dragged me from the stage in the middle of a scene. He has no right to do so—no right at all to interfere with my actions."

"It is only for you to say," the gentleman observed in his well-known voice and with his well-known manner. "If you place yourself under my protection I will see you safely back again."

The crowd recognised him.

"It's Jason Burgoyne."

Burgoyne smiled. He liked this sort of thing. It all did in the way of advertisement.

"Did you wish to return to the theatre, Madam?" he asked.

"Yes, oh yes," said Ann. "If you would kindly find me a cab."

"Which theatre is it you want to go to?"

"To the Boudoir."

"My brougham is at your service. I am going to the Boudoir myself."

All this while William had stood silent, with compressed lips and heaving breast, and, altogether, a most unclerical look upon his face.

He here laid his hand on Ann's arm.

"You will not go back," he said.

"Yes, I will."

"With—this—man?"

Ann turned away without a word.

The rain was coming down faster. She was glad enough

of the brougham's shelter. William looked after Ann's protector with a still more angry expression. It is probable that the latter gentleman thought it far from unlikely that the scene might assume melodramatic proportions. He kept his eye fixed upon the minister.

When Ann had taken her seat, Burgoyne also stepped into the brougham, and it began to move on. The van had gone by this, and the brougham therefore passed by the cab. William stood still a moment as though uncertain what to do, then plunged through the mud in pursuit, and laying his hand on the door, called out some words which were inaudible to the girl. The driver whipped his horses, and they dashed on.

Left in the road, bareheaded—for his hat had fallen off when he sprang forward—splashed with mud from the carriage-wheels, the minister presented rather a woeful aspect. The driver of the cab not clearly understanding the case, but fancying he understood just this much—he was going to be done out of his fare—came up with a bullying tone and demanded his rights. The crowd around joined in his abuse.

William's enquiry for his hat was met by derisive jeers. Somebody from behind pushed some one who stood nearer roughly against him. Somebody flung a piece of orange peel, which struck him in the face. The crowd laughed loudly.

William grasped his umbrella, and brandished it like a sword. He seemed as though he meant to charge his tormentors, and deal destruction right and left. But his better judgment coming to his aid, he thought of the scandal which might ensue, and the harm that it would do him, and turned away.

They were only waiting for this. In an instant he was hustled and pushed and pelted. Had a policeman not come fortunately to his rescue, he might have been rather roughly handled. As it was, he only had his pocket picked.



CHAPTER VII.

AHEN Ann returned to the Boudoir she found affairs in an alarming state. Poor little Addleton was prostrated, mentally and physically. Harry Draper was looking very savage ; the rest were complaining loudly, with the exception of Miss Flo Span-glass, who looked on with a sarcastic smile.

“I thought how it would be,” she said.

How could she have expected any such *fiasco*? Oh, you ladies ! you ladies ! how you do hate one another !

They were all dumbfounded at seeing Ann come back ; and for some moments it appeared as though the circumstance was not likely to help the actors out of their difficulty. Harry Draper, however, his first surprise over, was equal to the occasion.

“I’ll go in front and explain matters, and ask for a short delay.”

“Oh, how can I go on again?” said Ann. But they crowded round and persuaded her.

Draper stepped in front of the curtain. The audience were in an unsettled state ; some were leaving the theatre with loud expressions of disgust.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” said Draper, “let me entreat your indulgence and consideration for three minutes only, and the young lady will resume her performance.”

There was astonishment and applause ; for they had been told a few minutes previously that the young lady had been taken suddenly ill.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he continued, “I have a very

extraordinary revelation to make. You have many of you, I dare say, heard of a popular performer of the name of William Bradshaw — I mean, of course, the Reverend William Bradshaw we read so much about in the papers."

Here there was a half-laugh. Was a joke coming? It would not do to be premature.

"He is not, strictly speaking, in the same line of business as your humble servant," continued Draper. "He has been recently 'starring it in the provinces'; but I believe his is not exactly the legitimate drama."

Here the laugh was louder and more general.

"I am proud to say, that for the Boudoir Theatre this very evening has been reserved the honour of his first appearance on any stage. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, astonishing as it may appear, the mysterious figure you saw upon the scene some twenty minutes ago, whose name was not to be 'found in the small bills,' was none other than the celebrated Mr. Bradshaw."

Loud applause and laughter.

"And how do you think it occurred? I will tell you. Mr. Bradshaw objects to dramatic entertainments: objects to them very much indeed. He means, if he can, to put them down altogether; only I do not think he will be able to do so."

Applause.

"Not if you will still give your patronage to them, ladies and gentlemen."

Very loud applause indeed.

"Mr. Bradshaw thought he would begin with the Boudoir. He said to himself, I suppose, 'Here is a young lady who will make a noise in the world, and a great name for herself in the profession.'"

Tremendous acclamations.

"'She sha'n't do it,' said Mr. Bradshaw, waving his umbrella. You saw the umbrella, ladies and gentlemen."

Screams of laughter.

"And so Mr. Bradshaw and his umbrella triumphed for a time—I say for a time—but the young lady was rescued. By whom? By none other than Mr. Jason Burgoyne, the celebrated dramatist, who chanced to be passing in his carriage at the moment that this man Bradshaw was dragging the poor defenceless young lady away in a street cab. Yes, in a four-wheeled street cab."

Profound sensation.

"Ladies and gentlemen, after what I have said, I know I need not ask for your forbearance, should the young lady's very natural agitation, after such an unusual outrage, somewhat impair her performance of the other act of our comedy. She will, I know, do her best through love of a profession in which her beauty, grace, and talent hold forth such bright promises for the future. Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to apologise for trespassing upon your time."

There never yet was speech better calculated to enlist an audience's sympathy. A round of applause and a call for the heroine of the evening succeeded. She was led on by Draper amidst general acclamation.

There was a call from some unseen quarter for William Bradshaw, and to this Draper replied :

"I think I am authorised to state, ladies and gentlemen, that Mr. Bradshaw has run away, umbrella and all. He will, however, by particular desire, make his re-appearance upon some future occasion, and dance a hornpipe."

The curtain now very shortly drew up upon the interrupted scene in the comedy, the mud having been wiped off the white satin as neatly as could be ; and the act was brought to a triumphant conclusion. Poor Ann did certainly exert herself to the utmost, and the performance was a creditable one : in some parts, really artistic and clever.

When at last the piece was concluded, there were calls for author and actors. Few theatrical triumphs could have been more complete ; and one wondered how so successful an affair could be disposed of in so few words when the theatrical organs treated of it in their Saturday's impression.

But how about William after his woeful discomfiture ? In what out-of-the-way hole-and-corner had he hidden his diminished head ? When Ann and her mother, and James Jarman, reached home about half-past one o'clock in the morning, they found William waiting for them in the parlour. He was sitting bold upright clutching his umbrella.



CHAPTER VIII.

FHEY all came to a standstill at sight of the visitor. James was the first to speak. He instinctively knew that this was his cousin.

"Why are you here?" he asked. "What do you mean by your conduct of this evening? You must not act in such a way again, or we must treat you like a ruffian or a lunatic."

William blushed red, then turned white.

"Who are you to question my conduct? Ah, I suppose the rich cousin? Well, I have nothing to say to *you*. I must speak to my aunt."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear, William! I really wish you wouldn't," said Mrs. Whitaker. "I don't feel at all well. Do be reasonable. Wherever is the harm?"

"The harm! The disgrace — the infamy, you mean. Where is it to end?"

"Your views are very violent," said James. "Even if you object to the stage as a profession, you must understand that Ann was only acting for amusement."

Ann broke in, impatiently :

"I will go on the stage as an actress if I like. Why should I not? I think I shall."

"Oh, dear me, Ann," cried Mrs. Whitaker; "how can you go on so before your Cousin William, when you know he does not like it?"

"He has no further claim upon me," said Ann. "All is over between us."

"Yes; I know that," said William, in a dogged tone. "I

won't interfere again. I only came here to make quite sure that what you were doing was with your mother's consent. I cannot understand it; but, if it is to be, so be it. I wash my hands of the affair from this moment." And he moved towards the door.

Mrs. Whitaker, who, with a very miserable aspect, was sitting shivering before the fire, as near to it as she could get, here interposed :

"Dear me, how sad all this is! When you know too that you have both been engaged to be married since you were little children. How can you, Ann, want to go on with your play-acting if William does not like it? There, there, sit down all of you, and let's have a bit of supper."

There was no supper to sit down to, for they had supped at the theatre itself, with champagne and speeches. Every one looked round at the old lady when she made this remark. She was nodding her head at the flames, and rubbing one hand over the other dreamily.

"Your mother is not well," said James. "We must not keep her up any later. I will call on you and talk this over, William. You had better go now."

William went, and a few minutes later James fetched a doctor.

Next day when the Reverend Mr. Bradshaw was seated at his desk jotting down notes for his Sunday's discourse, a stranger was announced. It was Mr. Harry Draper.

"Mr. Bradshaw, I believe?"

"Yes. I have not the honour of knowing *you*."

"My name is on that card. I will as briefly as possible explain the purport of my visit. You took a very strange part yesterday at an amateur performance at the Boudoir Theatre."

"I took a part?"

"You understand me, I am sure. You interfered with a young lady in an unwarrantable and ungentlemanly manner. If you were not a clergyman I would horsewhip you for it."

William started to his feet.

Draper continued—

"You need not call for assistance. There is no danger."

William laughed harshly.

"I am quite well aware of that. None at all. You mis-

took my motive. I wasn't going to ring the bell, I was going to knock you down."

Draper, in a fury, raised his walking-cane.

"Why, you cur," he cried, "if you threaten me I won't spare you after all. Take that."

William took nothing, however, for he caught Draper by the wrist in an iron grip, and wrenched the stick away. The other closed with him in the most scientific fashion, but his science was as naught against his antagonist's strength. A desperate but brief struggle, and he was pinned, panting, to the wall.

Then William said, in a voice which was but little agitated—

"It is as well, perhaps, that I am a clergyman, as you say, or I might be tempted to throw you out of window."

Draper raged furiously but impotently for awhile. At last, seeing how hopeless was the case, he mastered his rage.

"You have got the best of it so far. I've been ill lately, or you would not have come off so well. But for all that don't think you can pursue the conduct of yesterday night with impunity. There are other weapons besides fists. I am determined to protect that young lady, and I will."

"What is the young lady to you?"

"No matter. You have no right to ask. All relations between you have ceased."

"She is still my cousin, you must remember, and I shall use my own discretion as regards my future acts. You will excuse me if I say that I hardly think you are the most desirable and discreet champion that she could have chosen."

Draper, still at a great disadvantage, seemed to lose all his old power of sarcasm and irony. He could only bluster.

"I give you fair warning, mind. It will be a dangerous game if you persist in it. You have a name and a position to lose, and cannot afford to be dragged into a scandal. The whole affair shall be made public, rely on that. Now, take my advice, and be quiet. Your interference is not wanted. Your good advice will be thrown away."

"Read this," said William, and he handed the other a letter, which ran thus:—

"MY DEAR NEPHEW,

"I have been thinking of what occurred last night, and have been very unhappy. Ann was wrong, and this

must not go on as it is. My poor Samuel's dying wish was that you should be united. Come to me at once, I am very poorly.

“Your affectionate aunt,
“SARAH WHITAKER.”

“Are you going?” asked Draper.

“Certainly.”

“Is it a battle between us, then?”

William smiled, and resumed his place at the table; and Don Cæsar, not quite so Don Cæsarlike as usual, took his departure. He went home in a fury, and had some notion of sending Bradshaw a challenge.

“The low, canting beggar would not accept if I did. But he sha’n’t triumph over me for very long, although his muscle is a little harder than mine.”

While these thoughts were passing through his brain, our hero took up his dumb bells and began to practice. He surely never meant to go into training, and have a regular set-to with his reverend rival. No, he was not as foolish as all that. He had a scheme in his head—a great scheme, by which was to be obtained a grand dramatic vengeance.





CHAPTER IX.

MRS. WHITAKER was very ill indeed. She had caught a fresh cold on the top of the old one.

"Those wretched theatricals," she said. "Ah, Ann! I wish we had never had the misfortune to go to such a place. It's a judgment—I'm sure it's a judgment."

She sat up in bed, and with a painful effort wrote the letter just now reported, to William Bradshaw; and while she waited for his coming she again and again referred to the subject.

"You must make up your quarrel, Ann. It is my wish—my dying wish—for I feel sure I am not long for this world. I must see you once more reconciled, and then I shall die happy."

Ann made no reply. It was useless to argue the point with the old lady, upon whom words had no effect. Should she seek James, and ask his advice? Unfortunately he had gone out. He had been out all day.

William called in the afternoon, and Ann was present at an interview between him and her mother. Mrs. Whitaker treated it as a matter of course that a reconciliation must take place. William had some good advice to give. He regretted that Ann should be so hasty—so wayward. But she had a good heart. She would see upon reflection that her conduct had been very improper.

Ann stood by silently. She might have been acquiescing in the arrangement. She was, instead, in a fury.

"The poor child will be homeless and friendless when I

die," said Mrs. Whitaker. "What little money remains will scarcely support her, and how can she live unprotected? No, I must see her married, and then my mind will be at rest."

When William had gone, Ann burst into a fit of passionate tears.

"How can you, mamma, shame and humiliate me in this way! If I had to beg my bread in the streets, I would rather do so than be dependent upon him. I hate him, mamma, and I love some one else."

"Oh, how you talk! What a strange girl you are! I'm sure I don't understand you."

She did not, indeed, poor lady, for her wits were wandering.

That night, instead of James's return, a letter came from him, saying that he was obliged to be away upon some important business. He might be absent a couple of days. Ann was in great distress. Here, at the moment when she most wanted his help, her friend and adviser was absent. To whom could she apply?

While she was still hesitating, next day William wrote to her. It was a long letter, very carefully worded, and very precisely written, with not an *i* undotted or a *t* uncrossed. It said that for his part he was willing to overlook the past, and that he should be hopeful of the future, if she but gave him her assurance that as soon as the necessary arrangements could be made, she would dissociate herself entirely from all recently-formed friendships.

He had, he reminded her, yet a way to make in the world. He occupied a position where many, many thousands of eyes were fixed upon him; there must not be the faintest breath of scandal attached to the woman whom he was to make his wife. It was true that several advantageous unions were open to him did he choose to contract a matrimonial alliance with one of certain members of his congregation; but through life he had never broken his word or departed from his promise. He had promised his aunt that he would marry Ann, and that promise he was now ready and willing to fulfil.

Ann read all this through—eight closely-written pages—with a face which alternately flushed and paled. Then she tore the letter up into small pieces, placed the frag-

ments in an envelope, and directed it to Mr. William Bradshaw.

The servant girl, who had unobserved seen the action, took the letter to the post with a chuckle. When she returned she found Ann dressed ready to go out.

"I sha'n't be long," she said ; and she took a cab to the Temple.





VI.

IN PARADISE AND ELSEWHERE.

CHAPTER I.

HINGS lately had been going very badly indeed with the struggling shopkeepers of Straggleton New Town. The hostelry of the "Four Winds" had changed hands, the late landlord retiring to Whitecross-street. Only a little while ago he had been sanguine as to the success of his new billiard-room—for at first there had been a good deal of custom for it.

Driven to desperation, the shopkeepers had come there to drown their sorrows in the bowl, and in a friendly way had taken each other's lives at pool over his green baize table. But though things looked promising, the proprietor of the house lost patience, and wanted his rent. The billiard-table was seized in default.

So very bad a look-out was there from a commercial point of view in Straggleton New Town, that even the most sanguine building societies gave up the idea of new streets in despair, and endeavoured to dispose of their skeletons at a loss. On all sides therefore were to be seen the crumbling frameworks of houses that were never to be. A high wind arose and blew a lot of them down.

Such streets and houses as had been finished before all hope of the new town had died out, grew somehow prematurely aged. The gas-works and other works, all of a smoky nature, blackened the face of nature round about, so that the very buds in spring-time were dirty and soiled. The only things indeed that flourished in this unhappy neighbour-

hood were babies. There must have been something in the air besides the factory smoke, for not only did they thrive upon production, but they were produced in unreasonably large numbers, so that it seemed that every house had its twins, and those twins were always squalling.

The fathers of this numerous progeny were mostly in a bad way as regarded funds. In a time of full work and much overtime they saved nothing. The low beer-houses in those parts, fitted up with roughly made deal tables unpainted, were full of drunken mechanics every night—working men they called themselves—proud of their dirty fists and the honest perspiration of their brows.

Then came a strike, during which the brokers were very busy, and the loan-offices—there were two already, both doing a roaring trade—showed their teeth at many a fireside. The “United Vultures,” and the “Judas Iscariot Friendly Discount,” were naturally to be expected in such a locality. Their advertisements were shown in the beer shop windows—“Loans from £5 to £500,” and all the rest of the time-honoured story.

The mothers, too, were at the public-house as often as their liege lords. On a Saturday night there were always several fights, and the police-station had many inmates on a Sunday.

A squalid, miserable neighbourhood, growing daily more hopeless as its outer aspect grew blacker. The poor, half-starved, struggling population fighting its grim fights with want, selfishly heedless of any other sorrow but its own. How many millions are there of such strugglers in as hopeless case ! We find them in every young suburb, with the same sad faces and eager looks, fighting the same fight,—unhappy creatures whose births and deaths are duly noted in volumes kept for that purpose ; and when the weary play shall be played out, whose good and bad actions will be weighed as carefully no doubt as those of their more fortunate brethren. Of whom the Recording Angel keeps as accurate an account.

And how fared Frank Pickering all this while ? After so promising a start, had his progress been as encouraging ?—had energy and perseverance secured to him a well-merited success ? No, no, no !—by no means.

Frank Pickering’s shop stood where it did ; but it was no longer a post-office. There were no longer any pianos for

hire ; the stock of stationery had grown scanty ; some of those well—too well—selected works of fiction with which he had started a year ago, yet hung upon the shopkeeper's hands unsold—it had been found advisable to "go in" instead for cheap newspapers, the broadsheets of crime, the pictorial police news, and the most blood-thirsty of the penny serials.

The book-binding branch of business had collapsed. Something sickly in the sweet-stuff way was carried on ; fireworks were vended ; as far as one box of cigars and three dummies went, the tobacco trade might be said to exist.

But there was a too evident blight upon the whole affair. The very flies seemed to know it ; they settled down upon the dead-stock as vultures do upon the carcass of a desert camel. There were sad and solemn echoes in the bare shop and the empty house above. The melancholy tink-a-tink of the shop-door bell called forth a grim-faced female from the back premises, who looked as though she were attending her own funeral, or the funeral of the dead-stock.

As a rule, at this mausoleum of unlikely ventures they were out of everything anybody wanted. Intending customers fled precipitately, refusing all offers of having what they had asked for sent next day from town. They could procure what they wanted twenty yards off at another shop.

But how was this ? Only a year had passed away since that extremely energetic young shopkeeper, Frank Pickering, leased the premises. What had become of him ? who was the grim-faced female ? The grim-faced was no relation of his. Frank Pickering was far away. Over the shop door his name had been painted out ; the name of Walker filled its place. Unhappy Walker ! he or she—for Walker might have been the grim one—had come to fight and fall upon the battle-field where the fallen Frank had found his level previously, for Frank had failed too—very miserably.

The numberless houses of the nameless street were numbered now ; the street was named ; it was called a road—Great Something Road, only there was no Little Something Road to contrast with its greatness. And it led nowhere. The brick-field, now deserted, was yet unbuilt on. A new church was talked of, and would be erected directly the funds were found ; but the subscriptions hitherto had been small.

The corner house, where the Whitakers had lived, was now occupied by another family, who let lodgings in a wholesale way, or wanted to, and had cards of "Apartments Furnished" in wellnigh every window. Mrs. Whitaker was dead, and nobody knew what had become of her daughter or of the dark gentleman with the beard from foreign parts.

A person enquiring after them six months after they went away—a person who had been a member of Mr. Bradshaw's congregation—enquiring out of curiosity—could find no trace of the name of Whitaker in the neighbourhood. There seemed to have been a terrible panic in the commercial circles, and almost every shop had changed hands.

"They must have been before my time," was the general answer.

One, however, hesitated. "Whitaker—Whitaker," he said, "was that the name of them as bolted from No. 2 in the terrace?"

"It was either Whitaker or Wilkinson," said this person's wife.

The questioner never got nearer to a solution of the difficulty.

The way Frank Pickering made the acquaintance of Harry Draper, Esq., was this:—Draper came in one night for a sheet of paper and an envelope. He wanted to write a note, for which he also wanted a bearer. An idle boy being at that moment standing outside the shop-door, Draper called to him, and bade him carry the letter to its address.

The fact of the idle boy being Pickering's property, however, necessitated the asking of Pickering's permission, and this being graciously granted, it naturally came about that Draper waited for the answer in Pickering's shop.

While thus waiting, a conversation took place between them. It appeared that Pickering was to a certain extent acquainted with the person to whom the letter had been written; the person's mother visited there. Thus Pickering was of necessity taken into Draper's confidence—at first, somewhat to that gentleman's disgust; afterwards, because he was a willing and useful person, and existing circumstances required the employment of secret agents, and much mystery and machination.

As business was in a flat and unprofitable condition, Frank had a good deal of spare time upon his hands, and as he had also motives of revenge to prompt him, he lent his

aid willingly to what he thought neither Mrs. Whitaker nor "that mean humbug, Jarman," would approve of.

We find then that Jarman was a mean humbug—at any rate in his old friend Frank's opinion. Now, how was this? You may remember that day when James renewed Frank's acquaintance, the former made some proposition regarding funds to be found for a likely spec. Frank's conclusions as to Jarman's meanness arose out of this circumstance.

Frank had found a spec—several specs, all of which he was prepared to prove were extremely likely ones. There was but one absolute necessity to ensure the brilliant success of any of them, and that was a rush on the part of the public. Failing a rush of the public—of which James in his pig-headed way seemed doubtful—there was just a faint probability that a good deal of money might be dropped.

"But everything is a risk," said Frank.

"So it is," said James.

And then the conversation began to flag.

Undoubtedly the finest investment for James's money proposed was that it should be lent to Frank to do what he liked with in his business. The safety of this method was so great, the security offered so desirable—strictly personal, or if James liked it better, a friendly bill of sale over the goods at three times their value. By either of these methods, as Jarman could plainly see, he would avoid all trouble and anxiety.

Somehow, though, Jarman would not look at things in a proper light.

"I don't see how the money will help you," he said, after glancing over Pickering's books.

"Don't see how it will help me?"

"No. This neighbourhood's worth nothing for trade. It seems to me like a quicksand to you unlucky shopkeepers."

"Yes, yes, that's true enough," cried Frank, catching readily at the notion; "a fresh start is what we want—a fresh start in a fair field. Something on a large scale."

"What?" asked James.

When many hours had at different times been passed in consultations and negotiations upon this subject, Frank began to despair of ever getting hold of the money, and then he lost patience and grew very angry.

"I was a fool to expect anything else; but he surely ought to give me something for all the precious time he has made me waste. Not he! I sha'n't get a penny piece."

"It's very unkind of him," said Mrs. Pickering.

"Never mind; I shall do without his help, I dare say. But I must say one thing."

"Well, dear?"

"It was deuced bad luck that that fellow should have stepped into my shoes in the way he did, and gone and made a fortune in Jamaica, while I have been working my heart out for nothing in this brute of a country."

"So it was," said Mrs. Pickering, in all good faith.

Awhile after another idea occurred to the unhappy shop-keeper, which to some extent lightened his spirits.

"I've one thing to thank him for. He helped me to break off that absurd engagement with that girl of the Hicksons."

Mrs. Pickering, who could not quite follow this part of the argument, asked for an explanation.

"If I had gone away then, ten to one I should have returned before the year was over and married her. As it was, happily, things went otherwise."

He ignored altogether the part that the Captain O'Grady had taken in marrying Evelina, or the part that Evelina had taken in throwing Frank off entirely of her own free will. Half a century ago Johnson prosecuted Jackson for kicking him publicly. We read the case to-day in an old newspaper and five minutes afterwards are quite hazy as to whether Jackson were prosecutor or defendant. What does it matter now to anybody but Johnson's or Jackson's descendants, and perhaps not much to them?

There came a time when the affairs at the fancy repository got into a very desperate state, and then Jarman, humbly solicited, assisted with a loan of twenty pounds. But other loans had previously been effected, notably with the Judas Iscariot and United Vultures, and then followed writs, judgments, and executions, and other legal unpleasantness.

Harry Draper was appealed to among others.

"What do you propose doing," he asked, smoking his cigar while he spoke, "when you've smashed up?"

"What I can, I suppose," said Pickering glumly.

"Open another shop, and go another cropper?"

"I don't know."

"If you were instead to get some settled salary, would not that be better? A clerkship in some government office?"

"There's not much scope for ambition there," said Pickering in an injured tone, as though he had been, say Napoleon the Third, and had been offered the governorship of Jersey.

"But then it's a certainty."

"Have you any influence?"

"A little. I happen, by the greatest chance, at this moment to know of something. The salary is not large, but the work is light. You might employ yourself to advantage after office-hours. I need not, to a man of your talents, Mr. Pickering, point out the way. What say you, now? and if a friendly loan of twenty-five pounds is of any service to you, you can pay me back any time when you're able."

"What is the place?"

"It is in a registrar's office. A registrar of births and deaths and—and marriages."





CHAPTER II.

EAR away from Straggleton New Town and its shabby gentility, beneath a bright blue sky, facing the open sea, from which the salt breezes blew into its open windows on glorious summer days, stood Number One Paradise Row.

The Paradise Row aforesaid was at a little bathing-place east of London, which the reader may christen for herself, Whilkington-super-Mare, Shingleshore, Sandstone, or by any other fanciful appellation, as it is the custom of modern writers to name their localities — as perhaps the present writer would do also on this occasion, only all the names he can think of have been used before.

Has not, for that matter, a sea-side town been described over and over again — humorously, pathetically, and in the guide-book style? Yet if it has, there seems, somehow, always a sort of freshness and sea flavour about each description. It is what we call the winter season when these lines are being written. The leaves have fallen. A muggy, wet day, dull and sunless. It requires all one's powers of memory to recall the dead-and-gone summer, when the sun shone and the sea rolled in at our feet upon the sands.

Ah, how blissful was existence at What's-it's-name-super-Mare, during love's young dream — when the world was fresh and warm — when there was not the least possible doubt upon earth that everything would go on thus gaily ever more — that love would grow stronger the longer it lived, and that everybody was to be happy ever afterwards by special contract with Providence.

In those delightful days, surely, the face of nature showed more lovely than it ever did before or since. The women were much more beautiful, and the men more handsome ; and the fashions prettier and more becoming. How the glorious old sea rolled in too, with his frothy crown ! and how the coy nymphs fled at his approach—not fast enough, however ; for he always caught them—the boisterous old fellow—in his wet embrace, and smothered and tumbled them mid screams and scrambles.

How white the houses looked with the glare upon them ! and how green the blinds ! How the children laboured at their everlasting excavations on the sand ! and what strange fatality awaited their tubs and spades ! The rascals at the shops must have been in league together, and hired sharp-eyed knaves to lie in wait for the toys at all seasons.

How the donkeys galloped !—poor donkeys ! they would much rather have walked, or better far, stood still and eaten their dinners. How the heavy maidens on the donkeys' backs squealed with fear, and yet liked it ! How the young ladies with literary tastes persevered, to the exclusion of all other cares and objects in life, in their novel reading ! How those clever at their needle stitched ! How the rest flirted ! How all their skirts and ringlets, and wet back hair, fell in turns into the power of the raging wind, which ravaged the little town on rough days from end to end, carrying away after every visit a large spoil in hats, caps, and the like articles.

These rough days, but more especially wet days, were fatal to What's-its-name's hopes of keeping its visitors ; for at the first threat of foul weather coming, boxes were packed and trunks corded, and lodgings deserted even at a sacrifice ; and the up-trains filled to overflowing. But the new married couple at Number One cared not the value of a brass farthing what weather it was ; for the sun of love was shining : and in their eyes all Nature wore a joyous aspect, and smiled through her tears—that is to say, the rain.

Some women are many men's idols, and some have but one love to boast of. Perhaps the women of one love are loved the more passionately. Then again, it is a question whether it is not best for a loving woman to be only half loved, than to be loved desperately and only half appreciate it. Did the husband love the wife in this particular case as

much as she loved him? The landlady scarcely thought it possible.

"She's a sweet creature is Mrs. Draper," the landlady said. "And, oh! how she do doat upon that good gentleman of hers! It makes me quite young again to see 'em."

She in her time had doated upon *her* good gentleman—doated still just a little; but his was not a responsive nature. That was the landlady's good gentleman sitting on the iron railings opposite, with his back to the sea, smoking a pipe and staring his wife's lodgers out of countenance—an ugly blot of man, dropped as it were right in the centre of a pretty picture. That was Mr. Starkey.

Oh, those were such happy days spent in the airy drawing-room of Number One! Such a bright young face peeped out from among the flowers on the balcony! Such merry laughter echoed at all times from the open window! The male passers-by envied Draper not a little. The females looked on critically: with some disapproval even, and suspiciously.

There was a certain style and air about the young bride which was not thoroughly approved of by the other lady visitors at this little watering-place. There were large numbers of unmarried ladies who tossed their heads and sniffed the air at her approach.

"An actress, or something of that sort," they said; and one of the other lodgers one day asked Mrs. Starkey the landlady whether she was *quite* sure the persons up stairs were respectable.

Nobody could have behaved more like a gentleman than Mr. Draper. Even the landlord, who did not usually take a hopeful view of things, owned to this. He was a perfect gentleman, and parted with his money without a murmur; paid all that was asked of him, and asked no questions in return.

"Poor girl!" the landlady said one day to her husband. "I hope it is all right, for her sake. How she loves him! He'd be a bad lot if he treated her unkindly."

"Ah!" said Mr. Starkey.

He was not sentimental, nor was he very curious upon the subject, not exactly seeing what more he was to make by the business even if he found out whether the young couple up stairs were all they should be, or the contrary.

Being one day, however, by accident, near the drawing-room door without his boots, he was not above taking advantage of the circumstance, and applied his ear to the keyhole. Then he heard this :—

“ My darling Harry, how happy you have made me ! I was not worthy of being your wife. What could you have seen in me ? I often ask myself. But you did see something. Do you know, Sir, it is three months this very day since we were joined together in holy matrimony at that funny old registrar’s office ? ”

“ How do you know the time so exactly ? You have been looking at the certificate ? ”

“ Oh no, I haven’t. There was no occasion. Do you suppose I shall ever forget the date ? ”

“ What made you think it wasn’t right ? ” the landlord asked his wife half-an-hour later.

“ It was not me thought it. Some one said so.”

“ They were fools. It’s all right enough.”

“ So I said. At any rate, there’s the ring all right and regular.”

“ And the certificate.”

“ Have you seen it ? ”

“ No. I’ll have a try, though, if I get a chance.”

The landlady was not kinder or more attentive after this discovery. It would have been difficult for her to be so. She had taken an immense liking to the young bride ; and gave her and her husband much more than their share of the attendance—leaving the other lodgers to shift for themselves.

But she was very happy indeed to know that it was “ all right,” as her husband had termed it.

“ Poor dear ! ” she said. “ It’s a cruel world—a cruel, hard world, for anything of that sort. It’s very odd, though, I don’t quite believe in her good gentleman. Even now I don’t half like him, for all his fine words and handsome face.”

It was rather amusing how each of these couples—Mr. and Mrs. Draper, and Mr. and Mrs. Starkey—should respectively have objected to the male on the other side. Mr. and Mrs. Draper objected very much to Mr. Starkey.

One day Mrs. Draper said—

"What trade is your husband?"

"He isn't in trade, Ma'am," said Mrs. Starkey, with some hesitation.

"Not in trade! Doesn't he do anything?"

"Oh, lots of things, Ma'am, in the way of help."

"Is he helping now?" asked Draper, with a smile, pointing out of window as he spoke to Mr. Starkey's figure, as usual perched upon the rails in front.

Mrs. Starkey coloured, and was a little angry.

"We can't always be hard at it, Sir," she said.

"You are though, generally."

"Well, that's because it's my way, Sir. I like it."

"He doesn't, I suppose."

"He has a right to do what he chooses, Sir, I suppose, if he can get money enough—honestly," said the landlady; and flounced out of the room with the breakfast things.

Even a casual observer might have been inclined to think that Mr. Starkey was not of a very industrious turn; he was so very often seated smoking on the railings before mentioned, or basking in the sun on the pier, or drinking at the bars of the several public-houses.

He was currently reported to be an educated man. He had been something in the commercial way; and he had travelled. He was looked upon with some respect at the public-houses, where he was a good customer. He was of a cynical turn, and discussed local topics contemptuously. He was understood to be Liberal in his politics. His motto generally was, Down with everything — more particularly church-rates!

He wanted to know what was the use of a pack of parsons! Why were they to be fed and pampered? Who fed and pampered him—Starkey?

One day some one said—

"Why, the missis, don't she? She's al'ays a-toiling, and a-slaving, anyhow; and if it aint for you, Mr. S., who is it for?"

Besides Down with the parsons! Mr. Starkey's motto was also Down with all Cockneys! It is true that he had once been a Cockney himself, and had come from London and settled down permanently upon the little watering-place. He did not particularly object to resident Cockneys. It was the visitors—the excursionists—the tag, rag and bob-tail, as he called them, coming down in a mob, turning every-

thing topsy-turvy ; putting folks out of their way ; giving all sorts of trouble for precious little profit.

His listeners shared these sentiments heartily. The husbands of all the landladies, to a man, were of Mr. Starkey's *way* of thinking ; and objected, with all their might and main, to the people out of whom they lived.

All of them—hotel-keepers, cab-drivers, boatmen, bathing-machine proprietors — seemed quite agreed upon this point. They would be much better without the Cockneys. For instance, see how nice and quiet it was in the winter-time, when the inhabitants of the town and the north-east wind had it all to themselves !

The wives, who stopped at home and worked the flesh off their bones, as the saying is, did not altogether share in this opinion, for they did not see how they could get on if there were no season, during which the money for the winter-time could be earned and put away.

But yet in the dead time only was there a chance of rest and recreation. The women-kind every now and then, after the season was over, went out for walks, by way of recreation, and looked at the wonderful sea—wonderful because it could form an attraction to draw Cockneys by the thousand down to look at it—more wonderful still, because the Cockneys' chief delight seemed to be to wash themselves in it.

What a notion, the residents thought, “to wash out of doors in cold salt water, and dress and undress in an uncomfortable, wet box upon wheels, and pay money for the privilege of so doing !”

“It's a hard life,” Mr. Starkey would say sometimes, after spending a long summer's day smoking his pipe and watching the tide in and out. ‘ It's a sad thing to have to work when everyone else around is idling, and lounging, and dreaming away the busy hours. I shall be glad when we've put by enough to chuck the whole thing up, and settle down and rest our poor bones.”

He was resting his poor bones at the time upon the iron railings.

“Look at those beggars now in our first floor ! That gal and her fellow ! What are they, I should like to know, that they should roll in the lap of luxury, while I am content to pick up the crumbs that fall from their table ?”

“Good big crumbs some of 'em, aint they, Mr. S.?” asked the friend in whom he was at the time confiding.

"Perhaps so," replied Starkey, a little angrily; "but they're not large enough either. Never mind: I'll set my claws in a big swag some of these days, I hope. I hate this humdrum, hand-to-mouth work, I tell you. I want to make my money a little quicker."

"That's what most of us want," said his friend.

Mr. Starkey said no more, but scowled ominously. His friend could not help thinking it would not have been quite safe at this moment for a weaker man, carrying a good round sum of money, to have met Mr. Starkey in a dark and lonely lane.





CHAPTER III.

HOW happy and careless that young girl was ! Her book lay open on its face, thrown down and left where she had been reading it. The flowers she had meant to put into water were lying faded by the empty glass. The piano stood open. Her hat lay on the dinner-table : her shawl and scarf—one on the sofa, the other on the back of a chair.

That morning she had intended to get up early—to practise a good hour at her music—to finish reading that first volume, for which they had already asked her twice at the library—to do a score of things all wanting doing badly : but here was the day three-parts over, and nothing done at all.

Oh, days of early love ! If there were forty-eight hours in each of you, and one hundred and twenty minutes in every hour, would there be time enough ? Of course there would not. There never had been such happy days as these in Ann's wildest imaginings. Such dreamy days of endless billing-and-cooing, beyond which, as it seemed to her, there was no happiness to wish for.

What a delightful place this little watering-place appeared in her eyes ! She could almost fancy sometimes that the whole thing was a sort of play played there for her amusement ! There were the gaily dressed young ladies—the band — the crowd. The sea itself, perhaps, specially engaged to roll and tumble beneath the warm sun ! The music of that time ever after haunted her memory, and brought back to her, when she heard it, glimpses of the old dreamland from which the sunlight had faded, leaving all

dull and bleak. Then there came quite vividly before her eyes, the fresh white houses—the green blinds—the blue sky—the restless sea—the crowded street—the hum of voices which Death had hushed.

He must have loved her at that time, she thought. He used to call her pretty; and so indeed in her youth and happiness she was; although it was by no means the beauty of a *Keepsake* heroine. At that remote period of English history were worn neat linen collars and cuffs, and black-and-white striped dresses, and black leather belts with big buckles. Leather boots too were in vogue, with heels two inches high at least. It was also the custom to wear petticoats elaborately embroidered, frilled, and tucked.

Crinolines had quite gone out of fashion in civilised circles, but were adhered to loyally by the humbler orders, who did not think it looked respectable to be without them. Those who knew what they were about wore their frocks cut with gored skirts, and with just room enough to sit down in them with a few creases.

The hair was worn piled up upon the crown, and pulled down over the forehead, sometimes in little fluffy curls, sometimes straight, with trimly-cut ends; the latter style being known as the "Jack Sheppard." If possible, it was worn golden. At any rate, it was very little pomatumed, and worn as light-coloured as could be without the use of dye.

The ladies, just at this period, we see—the monstrous whalebone and wickerwork epoch at an end—were not quite so overflowing and boisterously aggressive in the matter of petticoat. This was a slim and supple period, in which the iron barriers that had kept the sexes apart had fallen down for awhile, and lovely woman seemed—always, be it understood, consistently with the strictest rules of propriety—generally more cuddleable.

How busy she was, too, this Ann of ours, although she did nothing whatever. It was her duty to make the tea in the morning, and she never by any chance was in time to do it. And then the pouring out; what a process was that! It somehow happened—Mrs. Starkey must have done it on purpose—that everything was always on the other side of the table, and when she was obliged to reach over Harry to get the articles she required, he used to hold her there in a half-flying attitude, like a fairy alighting, and kiss her.

During all the length of that memorable honeymoon, she did not half a dozen times remember to put sugar in his tea ; and when she did, she on those occasions sweetened it twice over. She used to lock up a variety of drawers and boxes, because Harry said it was the proper thing to do ; but then she used to leave the keys lying on the corner of the mantelpiece, or on the centre of the table, so that there was not much security in this mode of proceeding.

Mr. Starkey had a way of looking into the lodgers' rooms when they had gone out for a walk, and sometimes he lost nothing by these little visits. There were odd cigars lying about, which had evidently been forgotten, and these, if hidden on the ground behind a sideboard, might be produced if enquiry were made, or taken away altogether if there was no enquiry, next day. The same with small coins and other trifles.

Mr. Starkey found it well worth his while to go upon these little tours of inspection, and, indeed, to keep his eyes open, as he called it—meaning at keyholes and such-like places, against which he also applied his ear when he thought he was likely to hear anything to his advantage.

Mrs. Starkey meanwhile worked away as hard as she could work, and found the days too short to rest in. But she never grumbled because Mr. Starkey took things easily. She had married a gentleman, she said, proudly, and she liked him to act as such. He acted as such accordingly. He took his rum-and-milk in a morning before breakfast. He ate heartily from the lodgers' tables. Then he took his lounge, and his cigar or pipe. Then his gin-and-bitters. Then his early dinner. He was not so selfish as to stand out for a late dinner, because he knew this would have been inconvenient for Mrs. Starkey ; but he was very particular that everything should be served up nice and hot.

Of an evening he mostly used the parlour at the "Admiral Benbow," where he was treated with respect. It was, "Good-evening, Mr. Starkey. How do you find yourself by this time, Sir ?" and other courteous salutations greeted his entrance, to which he replied calmly and with dignity.

Sometimes he took a little more than was good for him, and then some of the other gentlemen saw him home, supporting him by the way. Then Mrs. Starkey, who was

sitting up for him watching anxiously, would open the door, and entreat him to come in quietly and go to bed without disturbing the lodgers. Occasionally he complied with a good grace, and proceeded as gently as his unsteady legs would allow to his sleeping apartment ; but sometimes he would assert his right, as a man and a Briton, to make what noise he thought fit in his own house, and he had been even known to challenge objecting lodgers to come forth and try the question by single combat.

One day, when the happy couple had gone out upon the sands, Mr. Starkey accidentally looked into the apartment, and found that Ann had left her desk open.

There was nobody by. It was an opportunity that really ought not to be thrown away. He took a chair and sat down. First he looked to see whether there was any money or trinkets stowed away in its compartments, but there was not. Instead he found a ragged little programme of a performance at the Boudoir Theatre, very carefully wrapped up in several folds of paper.

Then he found some letters, which he read. They were mostly very short ones.

“ My darling—I am waiting ; can you come ? ”

“ I am here, my own love ; can you come ? ”

“ Do come, if only for a moment, dearest.”

“ They’re very loving, though they’re uncommon short,” said Mr. Starkey. “ I should say by the turn of them, too, they’re written by some one who didn’t want to compromise himself more than he could help. There’s no signature.”

He looked them through again, and then returned them to the envelope from which he had taken them.

“ Dearest ! my own love ! my darling ! ” He smiled grimly as he repeated the words. “ They’re as easy to spell as any other. There’s a genuine sound about ‘em, I suppose a woman thinks, when they’re addressed to herself. How silly they sound though to a third person, or to a court full of third persons when they’re read out by the counsel on the other side.”

There were several other papers of a private character—memoranda of events and payments, which Starkey designated “ bosh ” after perusal ; and then, wrapped up carefully by itself, he found a large official-looking instrument—

a copy of a marriage certificate between Harry Draper, bachelor, and Ann Whitaker, spinster.

"Ah! here," said Starkey, "are the celebrated lines. At a registrar's office. Witnesses, John Brown and Mary Squires. It would seem, then, from the paper, that the relatives of our young turtle doves were not present. Why was that, I wonder? I suppose they did not approve."

With this reflection he put away the certificate where he found it, and as he fancied he heard a footstep approach, beat a retreat.





CHAPTER IV.

MR. STARKEY lit one of his lodger's cigars, and took a stroll along the esplanade. It was very hot, and the parlour of the "Benbow" looked cool and shady. He dropped in for a glass of cold punch—it was the afternoon time—and finding he had the room to himself, lay down upon the sofa for a nap.

The sofa stood in the shadiest corner of the room, and in front of it was a screen, pasted over with many pictures. The window was open, and there was, Mr. Starkey fancied, a slight draught. He was very susceptible of cold, for he had spent some years of his life, and considerably impaired his constitution, in one of the hottest parts of Jamaica. He therefore rose and pulled the screen more round him, and then dropped off to sleep.

He had not been slumbering very long as it seemed to him, when the door of the parlour opened, and two persons entered. He recognised the voice of one of them at once.

"Will this do?" said Harry Draper. "We're alone here. What on earth are you so mysterious about?"

"I couldn't speak before her," said another voice—one he did not know, but the reader has already heard tell of its owner—Tom Yolland.

"Is it a secret?"

"That's for you to judge when I have told you. You are just simply a devilish lucky fellow, Draper. You always were, though. You were always confoundedly idle at everything, and yet always pulled it off. I'm one of the sort who are always hard at it, and hard at the wrong thing."

"Well!"

"Well. You asked for a consulship some months ago, and you gave the thing up as hopeless because the appointment did not come to you by return of post."

"Of course I did. It ought to have come."

"Well, it has come after a short delay. You've got what you asked for. I had it from a man in the Foreign Office. You'll receive the letter to-morrow or next day; but I thought I'd like to tell you the good news myself, so I ran down to see you."

"It was very good of you. Where is it for? Did you hear?"

"The consulship? It's for the place you wanted. I suppose about one of the best ports there is. With your connexions you will have the entrée into the best society. You may make a brilliant marriage."

"Yes, yes," Draper replied, impatiently. "Who the devil would have supposed that such a thing would have happened after all this delay?"

"It's nothing to grumble at though, now it has come."

"I don't know that. I think I shall refuse it."

"Refuse it! Never!"

"I have got other plans. I have made other engagements——"

"Come, Draper, be reasonable. I can understand what you mean, but I am sure she is too sensible to stand in your way if she cares anything about you. Between you and me, Draper, who know the world, do you believe these actresses have really any heart except for their profession? She'll see things in the proper light."

"You don't understand. She won't see it at all. It's not nearly as easy as you think."

"She'd never want to go too. That would be too absurd. It would be impossible; it would be known directly, and your position would be a barrier to all hope of advancement."

"It's impossible!"

"That's what I say."

"No, no; I mean it is impossible to leave her."

"Why? Look here, Draper! One word. You're not really married."

Draper answered promptly and decisively, "No. Certainly not."

"And yet you say——"

"That it is impossible. Yes, because I love her."

The door opened here, and some one entered. The two speakers rose and left the room, and Mr. Starkey sat up and rubbed his eyes.

"What the deuce and all does that mean?" Mr. Starkey asked himself.

That night, in the same parlour, Mr. Starkey introduced marriage as a topic. The marriage ceremonies of all countries were discussed at length. A gentleman present who had travelled a good deal had some strange stories of what was done in foreign parts. Mr. Starkey and two other gentlemen had been married in church, and they related their experiences. A Mr. Watkins who was of the company had been married at a registrar's.

"What may you have to go through in that case, Sir, if it's not taking a liberty?" asked Starkey.

Mr. Watkins was only too glad to give all the information in his power.

"It's not a religious ceremony like that at church," said he; "but you have to use a ring all the same. At least I don't think that matters much."

"Perhaps nothing matters much?"

"Oh, yes. There are ceremonies to be observed, and very particular ones. For instance, the door must stand ajar while the marriage is going on, and there must be four persons present besides the happy pair."

"But there are no prayers, are there?"

"There are very few words of any kind. The bridegroom says, repeating after the registrar, 'I give you this ring in token of my love and affection for you;' and the bride says also, repeating after the registrar, 'I receive it as such.'"

"Does she say 'as such'?"

"That depends who says it. I think it's generally 'as sich.'"

"However, that is all she does say?"

"Every word. The ceremony lasts about seven or eight minutes; but when it is over they are irrevocably united, to be parted only by death or divorce—or the workhouse authorities."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Watkins," said Mr. Starkey, as they walked away together, Mr. Watkins smoking a cigar,

which Mr. Starkey had given from his case, "I am most awfully curious to have a look at a certificate of a marriage before a registrar. Do you think now Mrs. Watkins would consider it a liberty if I asked to look at hers?"

"I don't see why she should, Mr. Starkey; the more so as you are such a favourite. But come in with me now, and we'll ask her."

Ten minutes afterwards Mr. Starkey had the certificate alluded to in his hands and was examining it carefully. To all appearance it was very much like the other certificate he had looked at that morning. There was a number—in this case 96—and there was a page—page 48. He recollects there were number and page on the other one, and that in that case the page was 52.

Both marriages had taken place in London, the other one about two months and this ten years ago. There were here two witnesses, as in the other case, but in this case one was the bride's mother, and the other the bridegroom's brother. Mr. Starkey handed back the document when he had mentally noted these particulars, and presently strolled homewards sucking at an unlighted cigar.

He came to a sudden halt in front of his house and took his favourite seat upon the iron rails. The drawing-room was lighted up. Ann was seated reading. Draper was pacing to and fro. After a turn or two he came forward and leant over the balcony. Mr. Starkey smiled.

"He's thinking it over, *he* is," said Draper's landlord to himself. "He don't half like it. Half like what, though? What the deuce does it all mean? Is there a marriage or isn't there? And what does it matter to me which is the case? Well, it matters just this much—H. Draper, Esquire; it seems to me you're keeping the thing dark for some reason, and it's worth your while it should be kept dark for some reason. Now, in that case, you ought to pay for it. Oh no, my dear Sir, I'm not above bribing. Don't mention it, I beg. I'm a poor man, who can't afford to be either virtuous or wicked without he makes something by it. Shall I make anything by the business, I wonder? It's hard to say; but it's uncommonly interesting in a small way, and I've plenty of spare time on my hands; so why shouldn't I go in for unravelling the mystery? By Jove, I will, too! I ought to go to town about my own law business; I'll kill two birds with one stone."



CHAPTER V

WHEN Mr. Starkey made his mind up to do a thing, he did it. Next day he went up to London, as he had determined he would over night, and he went straight to the registrar's office, and asked if he could buy a copy of his sister's marriage-certificate.

"What is her husband's name?"

"Draper."

"And your sister's maiden name?"

"Whitaker."

"Do you know when they were married?"

"About two months ago."

A search was made. "No one of that name has been married here during the last twelve months."

Mr. Starkey was much astonished, but there must be some mistake. "Were there no Drapers?"

There was a William Draper married to Mary Ann Edwards, but no person of the name of Whitaker appeared upon the register.

"It must have been at some other office."

"Is there another office in this parish?"

"No."

"I recollect one thing. It was on page 52."

Several pages of that number for various recent periods were consulted. Hitherto a clerk had been looking; now the registrar himself lent his assistance.

"You do not recollect the date?"

"It was some time in June."

The registrar whispered to his companion.

"That would be page 52. It can't have been any blundering of that fellow Pickering's?"

"As he's gone, we can't ask him. But then, if it had been here, of course you would have checked the entry."

"To be sure," said the registrar, and then he turned to Starkey.

"You've made some mistake. It must have been in some other parish."

Here then the enquiry terminated for the present, and Mr. Starkey returned home out of temper.

"What the plague did I expect to find out? Why the dickens didn't I make sure which parish it was before I set out on this wild-goose chase?"

Once or twice during the journey he mentally repeated these questions, and felt very much disgusted.

"I do believe I expected to find out there had been no such marriage at all. Well, it seems as if that was what I have found out—that is, if I was right in the office. But how could that be? the girl couldn't be deceived. There must have been a marriage, and Pickering—I wonder whether it's the same Pickering, the friend of that damned Jarman? I'd like to have it in my power to settle accounts with both."

This Starkey, you see, was, in a small way, quite a melodramatic villain—one of the sort with a life-long thirst for vengeance—only he was more like the villains of real life, and forgot his murderous purpose rather frequently.

Next day some startling events took place, and on the whole Mr. Starkey was more astonished than gratified.

Upon the sands at noon Draper met his friend Tom Yolland.

"Hallo, Tom! I thought you had gone by the last train over-night."

"I meant to have done so; but on second thoughts I stopped. I have seen her!"

"Her! Who? Ann? She has gone to bathe. Do you mean you have spoken to her?"

"Yes."

"What about? You never have dared?"

"How you talk, Draper. Come now; I know you better than you know yourself. Haven't you a thousand times expressed your sentiments—haven't you over and over again

said no woman was worth being true to? Sooner or later you would have grown weary and left her—why not now? I need not repeat all I told you about your poor mother's law-suit. She will look to you for help now, instead of helping you. You must not let this golden opportunity pass by."

"Yes; I know all that—I know all I have said, and I'm ashamed of myself. Tom Yolland, I thought I was a rake—a profligate of the first water; I've always acted as though I were a villain, and I have this time acted like a greater villain than ever; but I find I am a coward; I daren't leave her."

"What prevents you?"

"Nothing but that I am afraid. Did you say you had spoken to her, Tom? You don't mean that you have told her that—that——"

"I've told her you must leave her."

Draper drew a long breath. He was as white as a sheet, and shook somewhat.

"What did she say?" he asked, in a low voice.

"She consented."

Mr. Starkey, finding the coast clear after long watching, went up stairs to his lodger's room upon one of his little tours of inspection. That careless little girl had left her keys lying upon the mantelpiece when she had gone out to bathe. Mr. Starkey looked through the bunch, selected one, and opened the desk.

There was the certificate as he had last seen it. He took it out and looked at it long and carefully. The page was fifty-two, as he had thought, and he had not made a mistake about the parish. What did it all mean? Could the registrar and his clerk have overlooked the entry? That was not probable. There must have been some trick perpetrated, and the girl was the victim. Harry Draper had spoken truly when he said there had been no marriage.

And what was he, Starkey, to make by this discovery? While he stood asking himself the question, the certificate in his hand, the door opened without warning, and Ann stood before him.

But was it Ann? Assuredly not the Ann of a couple of hours ago, who had gone out singing as light-hearted as a bird; not the Ann he had seen so often smiling among the

flowers on the balcony—the prettiest and freshest flower of the whole nosegay ; not the Ann with the coquettish little airs and graces, the little pet words, pretty wheedling ways, soft pattings and purrings—*la petite chatte*, as he had loved to call her.

What Ann was this ?

A woman several years older—dull-eyed, swollen and heavy—and with pallid cheeks, on which yet remained the traces of tears—with features which, in this brief time, seemed to have hardened.

But it was the same Ann, of course. There was the pretty shawl, hanging carelessly, a little crooked, and unfastened ; there was the dainty little hat, the looped-up skirt, the frilled petticoat, the high heeled boots ; but the old air was gone. The clothes seemed somehow as though they no longer fitted her.

She started at sight of Starkey, uttered a low exclamation, sprang forward, and caught his hand in which the certificate fluttered. The rascal was too frightened to speak.

"What are you doing here ?" she said. "Are you, too, one of his agents? Has he sent you in to steal it and destroy it?"

Starkey recovered some of his courage on hearing no mention of police.

"I was sent by no one. I want to be your friend, Ma'am, believe me."

"My friend," she said, bitterly ; "such as I am now have no friends. There, you may steal that thing, if you choose ; you're welcome to it—it is only waste paper."

She turned from him as she spoke, and throwing herself into an arm-chair near the window, buried her face in her hands. The flowers hid her from the street. Starkey's eyes wandered stealthily from the certificate he yet held to the slight form trembling there, and back again. She looked round in a moment with flashing eyes.

"What do you want here?" she said ; "why don't you go? I suppose I have the right to order you to go ; this is my room yet—until he turns me out into the street."

"Don't—don't talk like that, Ma'am," said Starkey ; "it can't be as bad as that. Don't talk of turnings out ; he mustn't play these tricks without paying for them. Make me your friend, and I'll show you how he can be made to pay."

"To pay!" she cried; "to pay for what? No; I wanted his love—nothing else. He has no money to waste on me. His friend has told me all—how his mother is badly off, how she will look to him for support, how——"

"Who was this Mary Squires whose name is written here?" Starkey asked, interrupting; "and the man? Who was present?"

"Nobody but the registrar, of course—Mr. Pickering."

"But there are witnesses' names."

"They were in the other room, I believe—I was told. But you know well enough. I suppose they deceived me in everything; I had no one to advise me! I was mad! It was a just punishment."

"No, no: you must not look at it in that way. It is a more serious business, this, than you or he think for: it may go hard with him and his accomplices if it becomes public, and I for one shall not keep the secret."

"What do you mean? Upon whose part are you acting? Did he not send you here?"

"No; I am acting as your friend, I tell you, and I mean that you shall have justice. He shall marry you in reality, and he shall pay me well to be silent, or——"

She hurried forward and endeavoured to possess herself of the paper; but he was too quick for her, held it aloof, and presently thrust it into his pocket.

"Give it me back!" she cried, struggling with him; "give it me back, or I will cry for help. You have no right to it: you shall not injure him."

"You will injure him if you make any noise," he replied; "because I shall tell the whole truth at once. It's a transporting matter for your husband, I tell you. Now, be cool and reasonable. I can manage it yet, so that he marries you. If it is properly put to him, he dare not refuse."

She turned away and burst into tears.

"Keep the paper," she said: "but you can do no harm, I am sure, unless I choose to speak, and they should tear my tongue out first. Marry him!" she exclaimed, after a pause; "how low do you think I have fallen? What kind of pitiful creature do you take me for? I would rather die than marry him now! There, leave me for a little while, if you please. I want to pack up a few things; I am going away."

"Going away!" he repeated. "Take my advice—don't do

that. Have you seen him since his friend told you everything? You must stop and see him."

"See him!" she said with a sort of shudder, and turned wearily away.

Starkey left the room, and went thoughtfully down stairs.

"I ought to make something out of this," he said to himself.

She was left alone. How cold and desolate the room looked! The sun at that moment had hidden itself behind a cloud; the scene without was gray and grim; the smooth sea rolled sluggishly in upon and licked the shore.

There were the flowers she had loved. The little bird he had bought her sat silent in its cage, its eyes following her, as she fancied, mistrustfully. There, at the top of her desk, were his two or three love-letters she had treasured so carefully, kissed so often. She took them up now, and lighting a match, burnt them to ashes—without tears, without anger, as she might have burnt any other commonplace scraps of paper, not these to which his burning words of love seemed to have given almost life.

"My love is dead!" she said, in a low tone; and again and again repeated the phrase—"My love is dead! It is all over! I must go!"

Go where? Here had been her home: she had been so happy here, so secure in the durability of his devotion—oh, how happy! What had these two or three weeks been like? A dream in a dream—a game of play: it had been a butterfly's life—a flower's life—and now she had served her turn, and had faded, and was left to die.

She gathered together such few odds and ends as she treasured most, and packed them in a nonsensical little carpet bag, and took up her umbrella and went out as though for a stroll. There was all the wide world outside for her to stroll in.

As she passed out of the room the sun burst forth again, and the little bird began to carol joyously; the soft zephyr from without wafted towards her the perfume of the flowers.

Then something within her breast seemed to labour painfully: was it her heart breaking, she thought? Her eyes filled with tears which blotted out the scene; she turned and hurried down stairs, and next moment was out in the road.

The old busy road, with its restless holiday folks hurrying or lounging on their way. The sands were crowded, as she had often seen them ; the bands were playing, the sky was blue, the sea sparkled. The old life as it had been going on before her for years—or only days, was it ? She turned her back on it now, and walked quickly towards the railway station.





CHAPTER VI.

WHEN she had been gone about half an hour, Draper returned and ran lightly up stairs. He looked eagerly round the room, and then hurried into the bed-room beyond, and then rang the bell violently.

Mrs. Starkey came up stairs in answer to the summons ; she looked pale and frightened.

“Where’s my wife ?” he asked. “Has she been in ?”

“The lady’s gone, Sir.”

“Gone ! When ? Where ?”

“Gone a little while ago, Sir—gone for good, I think.”

“What makes you think so ? What has happened ? What did she say ?”

“I didn’t see her, Sir ; Mr. Starkey knows.”

“Why the devil didn’t he answer the bell, then ?”

Mr. Starkey here put in an appearance, apologetically.

“I ask your pardon, Sir,” he said. Then in a less humble tone to the woman—

“You can go ; you’re not wanted.”

When they were alone he continued—

“The lady was very hurt and very angry—very angry indeed. I tried to pacify her ; but she would not listen to reason.”

“Poor girl !” muttered Draper, in a low tone.

“Of course, Sir, I saw at a glance how things were, and did my best. I think I persuaded her to take things more quietly.”

“What did she want to do, then ?”

“She talked of appealing to her friends, Sir ; but I did all

I could to show her the folly of such a course. I told her——”

Draper burst into a passion.

“Who are you to tell her one thing or the other? What did you know of the matter?”

“Don’t be violent, Mr. Draper,” said the landlord. “Don’t reject the assistance that was kindly meant.”

“Appeal to her friends! I can’t believe it. It is so unlike her. Appeal to her friends! What do I care for her friends?”

“I beg your pardon, Sir; but if I might be allowed to suggest, her friends might give you a deal of trouble.”

“Poor girl! It was quite natural she should be in a fury. How she must hate me!”

“Fortunately, Mr. Draper, I secured the worst piece of evidence.”

“How long has she been gone, did you say? I am wasting the precious time, when I might overtake her.”

“Half an hour; but I think, Sir, if I might suggest, before seeing the lady, you should be aware——”

“I have not a moment to waste now. There is a train goes directly, if I remember rightly.”

“One has just gone. She probably caught that. If you listen to me now——”

“Not now—another time. To-morrow—to-morrow week. I can listen to nothing, and think of nothing, until I have seen her.”

He rushed out of the room and out of the house without waiting for another word, leaving Mr. Starkey somewhat disappointed. As yet that gentleman’s negotiations seemed likely to be anything but profitable.

What must he do next? He hardly knew what he was aiming at himself. Except that he was a scoundrel ready for any dirty work that might offer, it was difficult to say what might be the part that Starkey was presently to play in this little drama.

Meanwhile, Draper lost no time in reaching the railway station. A passing fly took him there as hard as the horse could gallop; but he was too late. A train had been gone about ten minutes. From enquiries made of the porters, it seemed that a young lady answering to Ann’s description had been one of its passengers.

Without hesitating a moment, he entered the telegraph-office, and sent a telegram to a station a third of the way to town, requesting the station-master to be on the look-out, and deliver a message to her when she arrived there.

'The message was—

"For Heaven's sake, return ! I will explain all."

Then he waited, having given instructions that the result should be telegraphed to him at once. In a couple of hours' time there came a reply. It was not written by Ann, but the station-master.

"I gave the lady the message."

"Is that all?" cried Draper ; and stamped and swore with rage. When he was cooler, he sent another message back to ask what the lady said, and whether she had gone on by the train to town, or was coming back.

He waited to see the next train, which did not arrive for about a couple of hours longer, and he got the answer back still later. The lady had received his message—had said nothing—and had continued her journey. What to do next?

He wandered back towards his lodgings, and paused irresolutely before the door. Suddenly the idea struck him that, after all, she might have come back, and was waiting for him up stairs. In another moment he was in the room calling her by name.

It was twilight. The window stood open. A cold air from the sea fluttered a curtain in the inner room. He took it for the rustle of a skirt, and started forwards in excitement. But no ; no one was there.

Then he stood irresolutely looking out of the window upon the water and the deserted sands. Then rang the bell. Mrs. Starkey came up to see what he wanted.

"Your husband?"

"He has gone out, Sir."

"Where to?"

"I don't think he has gone far. He will be back soon to his tea."

Draper waited until he lost patience ; then started forth in search of him, but searched without success. It had just occurred to him as not a little odd that his landlord should have been mixed up in the affair at all. How did he come to know anything about it? Probably he knew where Ann had gone to?

While he was looking for Starkey in the various inns,

Draper chanced to notice a clock. The last up-train passed in less than five minutes' time. He would go up to town yet. Yes, he must go up to town. He could not rest here all night. He must see her before he slept.

There was just time to run up the High-street to the station, if the clock were right; and he did not waste another moment. He therefore abandoned the idea of looking for Starkey, and set off at a brisk pace. Half-way there, he saw another clock. If this one were right, unless the train was behind time, there was no hope of catching it.

He hurried on at full speed. Turning up the road leading to the station, he heard the sound of the coming train, and saw the red lights gleaming in the distance. At the same moment, the tinkling of the telegram-bell was faintly audible. As he rushed on, a hand was laid upon his arm.

"Draper! where are you going?"

It was his friend Tom Yolland.

"Leave go—damn you!" the other said, through his set teeth. "This is all your work!" And he darted onwards.

The train was at the platform now; and Draper knew by experience that the door would be closed, but yet he tried it. Then he ran out again, and vaulted lightly over some palings dividing the station from the road.

The train was moving on again by this time at a rapid pace. He rushed forward, and caught at the handle of a door. There was a shout from the porters—a scream from a woman who saw what was taking place. He lost his balance but clung, and was dragged, then jerked off and—crash and smashed.

With a shrill shriek the iron monster went upon its way; and a little pale-faced crowd picked up the fallen man, terribly hurt, but yet living.





CHAPTER VII.

WHEN they carried Harry Draper, senseless, bruised, and bleeding, back to his lodgings, they found a large official despatch awaiting him, on the envelope of which was printed, "On Her Majesty's Service." It was the expected appointment.

Yolland took it up and read the superscription somewhat ruefully.

"Curse the women!" he said. "What mischief they cause!"

This Mr. Thomas Yolland was not a magnificent prodigal like his friend. He had no private income, and was obliged to work hard. He was an author. He was not at all popular with the public; the public—except that portion of it which knew him personally—knew nothing about him at all; but yet he made between three and four hundred a year by his pen.

He had not a spark of genius, or a single original notion; but he wrote good English—"good Saxon English" they called it in the newspapers, when reviewing his magazine articles. He wrote for most of the magazines in, as it is termed, a popular style upon popular subjects—mild social essays, and wish-wash generally, all second-hand—thrice-told stories, which were yet pleasant reading, easily waded through, and immediately forgotten.

The publishers spoke of him as a most reliable man—trustworthy, punctual. In an age of duffers Yolland was much more likely to make his fortune than any of your mad-cap geniuses, intent on striking out new paths and starting

on wild flights of fancy of a wholly unprecedented, and therefore impracticable character ; who only once in their lives at the outside hit the public taste.

He was eminently respectable, was Yolland—wearing always a frock-coat of good cut, and throughout the summer a double-breasted white waistcoat. Trimming his whiskers very carefully, and abjuring all attempt at moustache. In his mild way he thought his friend Harry Draper “a devil of a fellow !” Sometimes he thought him like a young prince in a fairy-book. He was much more like a stage prince—all dress, padding, and make-up !

Yolland was strong and broad shouldered ; but he did not take half the amount of violent exercise his friend did. It was a part of this sham Hercules’ game of life to go in for extremes in everything ; and his dumb-bells were some pounds too heavy for him.

He was indeed a miserable sham, this handsome youth ; and his life seemed threatening just now to wind-up with a dismal failure. The doctor, summoned in haste to the railway station, had felt the patient’s pulse, and shaken his own head.

“He hasn’t got strength enough to bear a long illness,” he said. “If we’re not very careful, he’ll go out like a rushlight.”

Tom Yolland saw his friend put to bed, and sat down by the bedside to think what he should do. His presence in town was not absolutely necessary for some days at least. He could very easily do his work down there, and send it up to London by train. He therefore wrote to the laundress instructions for clean linen, &c., to be forwarded immediately, and made himself as comfortable as could be.

Harry Draper raved during the night, and called again and again for Ann to come to him. Once he was for getting up to go and catch the next train. Tom Yolland thought this conduct highly absurd, and finding that his arguments were useless lost all patience.

“Hanged if I don’t leave you,” he said, “if you can’t be a little bit more reasonable.”

In the morning Draper was calmer, and later on they talked the matter over.

“What has become of her ? Where has she gone ? Perhaps she has destroyed herself !”

“Not she,” replied Yolland impatiently. “Not at all

likely. She saw it was all over between you, and I dare say had some one else in view."

"That I swear she had not," cried Draper. "You do not know her—how she loved me."

"No," said Yolland, "I don't."

Later on again Draper cried out remorsefully,—

"What a wretch I have been! What have I not to answer for?"

"There's no doubt you acted very badly," said Yolland; "but I suppose it is not the first or the last case of the kind in the world. We must take care she does not want. But she has a small income of her own, has she not?"

"All my life I have been a wild and heartless libertine," cried Draper, melodramatically.

"Your beef-tea is ready," observed Yolland, in his prosaic way. "You're not to have it too strong;" and so Don Juan sat up with some groaning, and took his spoon food.

This portion of the sad story is not pleasant writing and can hardly be agreeable reading. One does not like to see one's hero down and grovelling. Men do not like women to know how poor and paltry, mean and pitiful, men can be; and women are all idol worshippers, and won't believe any such nonsense. No, Miss or Madam, it is wholly untrue what is above written. We are all grand creatures, virtuous and noble, or splendidly wicked! Such as you see us with your loving eyes, are we ever! There is no deception!

"I'm afraid it's all over with the consulship," said Yolland. "What bad luck! I wish I could only get such a chance."

"You shall write a letter for me to-night to the head of the office, explaining that I have met with an accident. I dare say it will be all right."

"Had I not better write to your mother?"

"Not till we hear a little more from the doctor. It will only alarm her; besides, she might take it into her head to come and see me."

"Well?"

"I don't know who might be here."

For some days it seemed as though the injuries resulting from Draper's accident were to be unattended with any very serious results. The letter respecting the appointment having been answered, leave was obtained for a reasonable

time, and Draper's general health appeared good ; but this state of things was doomed not to last very long. Some indiscretion brought on an unfavourable change, and it became, Yolland thought, absolutely necessary that Mrs. Draper should be communicated with.

Up to now the sick room had not been always so dull as it might have been, although Ann's presence had faded from it like a ray of sunlight. It fortunately happened that the great Jason Burgoyne, little Addleton, and Charley Skylights, members of the Rough Club, had come down for a lark to the little watering-place, and put up at the Royal.

These gentlemen dropped in and partook of Draper's cigars and claret-cups, and enlivened him with their merry prattle. Jason one day, not knowing how matters stood, asked carelessly,—

“Seen any more of that woman whom the parson fellow ran away with? She really had her notions. I've got something in a new piece of mine that she is just cut out for. I wish you'd drop a line for me, Draper, and tell her what I say.”

They were gay dogs these, and laughed and quaffed and consumed large quantities of tobacco in various shapes.

“Of a morning the place stands a end with the smoke,” Mrs. Starkey said. “I can't think it's good for the sick gentleman.”

It was not good for the little bird Ann had left behind her. In fact, one morning after the gentlemen had been merrier than usual, and stopped later overnight, it was found lying dead at the bottom of the cage.

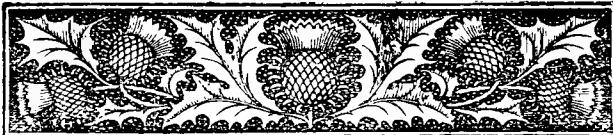
It was either the tobacco smoke, or the obstinate nature of Draper's internal injuries ; but from whatever cause, his case got very bad indeed. The merry gentlemen, when they went away, discussed his ailment in the smoking-carriage during the journey up to town.

“He's played out is poor Harry.”

“He hadn't the stamina for the life he led.”

“If he led it.”

Then there was some merriment. They laughed at anything these hilarious dogs—except adverse notices of their own works in the newspapers.



CHAPTER VIII.

AT last Draper's case seemed desperate. He had lain in bed more than three weeks and was as weak as a rat. He grew light-headed, and Tom Yolland got frightened. Yolland was required very shortly in town. Who, then, was to take his place at the bedside?

He was uncertain as to Mrs. Draper's address. She lived abroad, and changed her residence pretty frequently, following the progress of the fashionable world and the swallows. When consulted, Draper could give no reasonable answer. The only way was to search in his desk in the hope of finding the address upon some scrap of paper or at the top of one of the lady's recent letters.

The idea of overhauling his friend's private affairs was somewhat repugnant to Yolland's feelings; but what was to be done? His friend was quite delirious, and the case was urgent. He therefore unlocked the desk and searched.

Oh, what a desk! There were photographs and locks of hair put away in envelopes, and labelled "Clara," "Blanche," "Leonie." There were letters in women's hands, numbered and tied up in small parcels; some of the hands were not as good as they might be, and even at a passing glimpse it was easy to see that the spelling was as wild and hopeless as their love had been for this gay deceiver.

There were besides a few bills settled and unsettled, and among them one from the manager of the Boudoir, curious

enough in some of its details to be worth while quoting. It ran thus :—

	£	s.	d.
Contract for the use of theatre for one night, and supplying theatrical dresser, band for one night's performance, wigs, 300 tickets, door-keeper, livery man, fly-keeper, two Re- hearsals, and cleaning the theatre (six ladies for minor characters included)	11	0	0
Extra Rehearsal	0	10	0
2nd Rehearsal, 5 pints Bitter Beer, 19 bottles Ginger-beer and Soda-water at 4 <i>d.</i> per bottle	0	6	4
2 decanters of Sherry	0	4	0
Prompter	0	5	0
Leader of Band attending Rehearsal	0	3	6
Full Band, ditto	1	10	0
Cash paid for procuring an Actress from Dramatic Agent and Cab hire.	1	4	0
13 bottles Lemonade and Ginger-beer	0	4	0
18 persons to Supper at 5 <i>s.</i> per head	4	10	0
12 bottles and 1 pint of Sherry, at 4 <i>s.</i> per bottle.	2	10	0
Beef, Bread, Pickles, and Porter, <i>For Boots at the Swan</i>	0	1	0
<hr/>			
	<i>£</i> 22	7	10

There was also a collection of autographs from various persons, famous and notorious, of whose acquaintance Draper boasted a little in a quiet way, all pasted in a book ; and there was some artfulness displayed in the arrangement, for only a few letters were there in their entirety, and it was just possible that some of the others had not really been directed to Draper himself. A sceptical person might indeed have been inclined to believe that even here, in his desk, there was observable some striving after effect.

It was surely scarcely probable that when Draper made this collection he had said to himself—

“ If anything were to happen to me this is what I would leave behind—materials maybe for my biographer. What will my biographer say when he sees them ? ‘ Here are the odds and ends of the gay, witty, and wicked Draper ! His

was a good heart spoilt. He was not without many noble qualities. He was undoubtedly clever—nay brilliant; but a shameless scapegrace. His was a perverted genius! He had much to answer for!"

But it seems almost incredible, does it not, that anyone should be so weak? Since the days of those shallow rogues and overrated impostors, the Gallant Highwaymen, men have not carved their own epitaphs on "Newgate stone" or elsewhere, and poséed and mouthed in their dying hour like actors at the play.

Yolland, good simple fellow, took exactly the view which the biographer was to take, supposing the absurd theory given above to have had any foundation in truth.

He was both shocked and dazzled, but presently he found a letter which set him thinking.

It was one that Draper must have overlooked, for there could be no grand effect got out of it. It was from his mother, and Yolland had not the slightest intention of reading a word, had not the first line so surprised him that he involuntarily scanned the contents of the first page.

"My dearest Harry,—So you are going to marry Miss Ann Whitaker, are you. Very well. May you be happy. I am sure she must be a sweet girl, and of course you love her very much. She may not be rich, and her family may not occupy as high a position as my Harry ought to expect, but what then?"

Here the letter went over leaf.

What then? Tom Yolland could not help feeling desperately curious. What could be the meaning of such a letter in the face of the facts of the case.

"I must know how matters really are," he said to himself, after a moment's reflection, "or I shall be bringing about some tremendous quarrel between Harry and his mother."

And with this reflection he read on.

"Therefore, my dear boy, if you love the young lady, for goodness' sake marry her. If I could manage the journey, I should so like to be present at the ceremony, but you know what a wretched invalid I am. Anyhow, if I cannot come, I suppose I can bless you both from a distance. And now, with respect to this miserable law business, please go at once to that lawyer man in Furnival's Inn, and say exactly these words—"

The next two pages were wholly of a legal character, and the four succeeding filled with gossip relating to the society at the watering-place in France from which she dated.

"What does all this mean?" Yolland asked himself in wonder. "She did not object to the marriage, and I am certain Draper was in love with the girl. There could not possibly have been any obstacle. Why, then——"

Why, then? He was asking himself the same question some hours afterwards, and was as far as ever from any reasonable solution of the difficulty. There was, indeed, only one solution, and that was so outrageously absurd and unlikely he could not believe in it.

For the mere sake of keeping up his ridiculous reputation as a magnificent libertine, had he perpetrated the famous old mock marriage of romance, and perhaps broken the heart of the woman he loved. Love, though! What could such a melancholy jumping Jack of a hero as this know of love?

Yolland turned towards the bed, and contemplated with an expression not far removed from contempt, the pale, delicate face lying there. He was thin and haggard with his illness, and the other for the first time thought that there was a certain meanness and insignificance about the features of his friend, handsome though they were.

He wrote a letter that night to Draper's mother, telling her that her son was in a critical state, and begging her, if possible, to come instantly after receipt of his communication, as he was obliged very soon to return to town about his own affairs. Somehow it all at once occurred to him that he had wasted quite enough time by the sick man's bedside.

He waited three days, and then an answer arrived. Mrs. Draper was in the deepest distress at the dreadful news. She sincerely trusted, however, that things were not as bad as Mr. Yolland would have her believe. Unless there was a change for the better, she must really beg of him to write to her again at once. Being herself in a most precarious state, she would not undertake the journey if happily there were a favourable change. Otherwise, of course, she must.

"Pray," said the lady in conclusion, "consider a mother's feelings and write by return."

Yolland threw down the letter in disgust.

"Write by return," he continued. "If she were at all anxious she would say—telegraph."

Then he took an uneasy stroll to and fro in the room, and asked himself what was to be done next.

"I can't stop here," he thought, "and yet how can I go away and leave him in this pitiful plight. The doctor says he is a little worse to-day—may be much worse. I must say I don't think it at all fair that I should have the responsibility of his dying on my hands."

Eventually he determined upon an energetic course of action.

"I've three clear days I can spare; hang me if I don't fetch that old woman by force, for I do not believe she is any more ill than I am!"





CHAPTER IX.

GOM YOLLAND found Mrs. Draper in the French town, in lodgings up the High-street, not looking very ill, but groaning pitifully. She moved here in a small circle of English society, and was much looked up to.

It was a poor little shabby-genteel society at best, much the same as that Mr. Percy Fitzgerald describes so ably. There were a dowager lady of title, a baronet, and an honourable as stars, and some twenty families, all more or less in straitened circumstances, who found the French coast cheaper than the English one.

At the same time in the town was a mob of Parisian lions and lionesses, very rich and extravagant, who led a wild rackety life, at which the English looked contemptuously. There was a Russian princess among other notabilities, who changed her toilette four times a day, each change being more gorgeous than the last; and there were many others—grandes dames and cocottes, whose dresses were surprisingly rich and costly; but this unbridled luxury did not urge the British maids and matrons to similar displays, for with the generality of travelling English a certain frumpishness of attire is de rigueur.

They, instead, looked and marvelled perhaps in their heart of hearts, as the lady novelists say—envied a little, but they outwardly affected contempt, and some of them honestly entertained the feeling. Until the crack of doom many worthy Britons shall thus despise all foreigners—the French more particularly—and they will never believe that the nobles of any other than a certain island which shall be nameless, are aught else but mushroom-like impostors,

whom "any of our people, Sir, could buy up, ten times over, root and branch, and never miss the money."

When first the visitor was announced, Mrs. Draper evidently mistook the name, and took Yolland for quite another person ; for by the time she found out who he was, she grew gradually more and more ailing. It was very much after the fashion of the sham cripples, in that ridiculous ballet where the soldiers come in search of recruits, and the able-bodied villagers feign various ailments to escape the military glories awaiting them. Don't you remember how the rogues, when they thought the danger past, casting aside their slings and crutches, were dancing merrily, and how the recruiting sergeant and his men, returning in the middle of the jig, laid their hands upon the impostors' shoulders, and how the latter gradually, and by almost imperceptible degrees, resumed the crippled and distorted attitudes of five minutes previous ?

A savoury smell pervaded the entire house, and even while Yolland was there the French servant came blundering in to tell madame that she was "served."

"Dear me," said the lady, who was savagely hungry ; "I could not eat a morsel to save my life, but will you stay and dine?"

The stupid man did so, and the unhappy lady endured a small martyrdom in front of the dishes she could not touch. He did not eat much, having so much talking to do. He tried his best to persuade her to return with him to England ; then demonstrated, almost rudely, that it was her duty, and the least she could do under the circumstances. At last he went away, inwardly cursing the "heartless wretch," and next day returned to England alone.

His sojourn in this, a foreign land, was therefore a brief one—scarcely two clear days ; but he must have picked up an immensity of information during his short stay, for after that date, and solely upon the strength of this flying visit, he became a great authority upon all subjects connected with foreign life, social and domestic, politics, and political economy.

He came home in a most despondent mood, and was particularly sea-sick. When he reached little What's-its-Name-super-Mare, he found that some strange events had occurred during his absence, and that his services as sick-nurse were no longer necessary.



CHAPTER X.

HE generality of London residents get into a sort of way, when they have lived some years in town, of thinking that there are only certain districts where it would be possible for them to exist. Some districts lie low. The air in others is more smoky. Some are so deadly lively. No person “with any sort of style about them” could live in others.

And yet London is densely populated in all directions. Who are they, for instance, one might well enquire, who live down those dismal old shabby-genteel streets, and black and gloomy squares, lying between Gray's Inn-lane and Tottenham Court-road? The houses are large. The rents of some of them must be high, but what a neighbourhood, cut off from fashion and fresh air! What a death-like silence in some of the grass-grown no-thoroughfares. What a dismal look-out! and what a maze of ill-smelling back lanes and alleys surrounding the short-cuts from this sepulchre of lethargic respectability to the busy haunts of men beyond.

There are some streets round about this quarter where the appearance of the houses reminds one of canvas theatres at a fair. Without we have the imposing entrance, the Corinthian pillar, the flight of noble steps, the massive scraper, all holding forth delusive hopes of a corresponding scale of splendour within, which the first glimpse of the dirty bare boards of the lobby is doomed to dispel.

Within is quite a little colony. Lodgers on every floor—two on a floor, for that matter. A colony of desperately poor and hard-worked people, who have little time or inclination to

fraternise. Here single bed-rooms are let to single men—a strange race, coming in late and departing very early in the morning—going no one knows whither ; vaguely supposed to be “in the City.”

There are also very lonely single women fighting a hard battle with fate, and struggling for every mouthful of food. These are, if anything, more mysterious than the single men in the nature of their callings ; and not unfrequently have no calling at all, but are on the look-out—waiting with wan, anxious faces, which grow every day more wan and anxious as the hope dies within their breasts.

At such a house, up such a back street, lived such a lonely woman who called herself Mortimer, but was, in truth, the Ann Whitaker of the previous chapters of this history. Here she had been living about three weeks ; and had been trying very hard, and had failed very often, and was growing a little heartsick and weary.

She had come to town, not caring what became of her ; and buried herself, as it were, in this melancholy neighbourhood, abandoning herself to despair, praying for death, and wondering how long it would be in coming to her relief. But after a day or two of such bitter misery, that ever more the traces of its passage across her fair brow were visible in the tiny lines faintly but indelibly stamped there, better thoughts came, and she began to ask herself why she should die, and whether there was not still something worth living for.

It seemed to her, then, that the thing worth living for was the stage, where, perhaps, she might make a name, and win fame and fortune, if she got the chance.

“I will never love anyone again,” she said. “I will, till I die, hate all the world. But I will succeed without help. Yes, before I give in, I will work the flesh off my bones.”

There are many brave and resolute young hearts who have said as much and begun as hopefully. How many go forth to battle every day and are left slain upon the field ? The story is as old as the hills. We cannot all be successful ; but at least we can all, as we are bound to do, strive to succeed.

Ann was not without means. Her mother’s income was hers ; but as yet she had not touched it. It had been left in trust of James Jarman, and without communicating with

him she could not draw any money. The marriage had been a secret one, at Draper's desire, and she had obeyed blindly. Once she had said—

“I must let James know, must I not?”

“Why?” Draper asked, coldly.

She wanted to let him know that she was married. She had at the time acted more like one in a dream than in her waking senses. The reason for the mystery she had never asked herself. She followed blindly Draper's directions.

Her mother had been buried about three months. James Jarman was absent in the country, where the success of some speculation he was engaged in required his presence. Without anyone to take care of or advise her, seeing scarcely a living soul but the man whom she loved and trusted implicitly, it was no wonder he persuaded her as he chose. We all know how very differently, and with what superior wisdom, we ourselves should have acted had we been in her place—particularly now that her melancholy example lies before us. Now that the dream was at an end, and the stern and hopeless reality stared her in the face, she saw what a fool she had been to believe the preposterous romance he had conjured up for her deception.

Alone in the world—cut off from all hope of respectability, as it seemed to her—branded and disgraced—how dare she now face James Jarman?

“I will starve first,” she thought. “I will work unaided. Others have done so before me.”

She set to work hopefully. She called upon several metropolitan managers, and stated her case. She found many other persons anxious for an audience, and loitering round the stage-door. She found too, that as a rule, a young, well-dressed, and good-looking woman—(are not “well-dressed” and “good-looking” almost synonymous terms?)—obtained more easily access to the Presence.

The London managers she found to be pleasant spoken and affable. They were in want of every sort of talent but her talent. They asked her what she had done before, and were sorry she had had no stage experience, or they had something which might just have suited her. Some offered her a glass of wine and a biscuit, and expressed a wish that she would favour them with a call if ever she was passing that way.

She came from the theatre sometimes after one of these

interviews quite light-hearted and smiling sweetly. The poor shabby folk, yet waiting for their turn—a turn which sometimes never came—nudged one another and grumbled. They thought, to use their phrase, that she had “pulled it off.” But it was not so. Ere she reached the street corner, the golden vision vaguely shadowed forth in the good gentleman’s gracious remarks had already begun to fade away. After all, he had made no definite promises. She was, in fact, just as far off being an actress as ever she was.

When she had tried the West-end managers, she turned her face towards the east. She had once been to an East-end theatre, and had laughed heartily at a tragic drama there performed. It had seemed to her that nothing could be much more absurd than the play itself, and the way it was played. There was a ridiculous nobleman, who wore the same pair of Hessians throughout a long life of crime, extending over fifteen years and four acts!

This same person had a way quite his own of strolling up and down Fleet Street without his hat. There was another, who said, “Here’s a go!” instead of “Years ago”—and who told interminable stories to help on the plot. The women were wretchedly ugly, and ill-dressed, and vulgar, she thought. The management of such places, then, must only be too eager to snap up any available talent and beauty.

Strange to say, though, they were not. These people seemed to live in a small world of their own, which the four walls of the theatre bounded. They spoke of West-end stars familiarly, with an abbreviation of their Christian names, and pooh-poohed their worth.

“Bob Diamond! Bah! Had him here, and paid him a heap of money. Didn’t bring me half of it back again. I’ve a man here of my own who could knock him silly in any of his crack pieces.”

One manager was not quite sure something might not be done for her.

“What will you pay?” he said.

“Pay! I have no money.”

“Oh, dear me. And your friends; have they none?”

“No.”

“Oh, dear me. Well, I should advise you to give it up. The stage is not a fit place for any lady. You’ll find it a life of great drudgery. You had better go down to the country, I should think, and work hard for the next five years.”

"And then?"

"And then go on working; unless somebody by accident comes down and sees you, and offers you two pounds a week to take the lead at one of the West-end houses."

Ann drew down her veil to hide her tears, and took her departure.

She tried the agents next who advertised their power to get engagements, and paid certain fees, and had her name entered with great formality in certain books, but nothing came of it.

Mr. Mantrapper was very sanguine at first. He leant back, and looked at her with a thoughtful air. He said—

"Bless me! What a likeness! Is it Farren or Furtado, or one of the Moores? Your voice is just like Vestris's was. You can sing and dance, of course? I wish you were in the acrobat way now. I've a splendid opening for a female Leotard at the Little Orpheus. Could put you on directly."

Ann timidly expressed her views. She was not particular what it was she did, as long as it was not the flying trapeze. Mr. Mantrapper took his fee and entered her name.

After this she called several times and paid some more money; but nothing had turned up that was likely to suit her. Her small capital was almost exhausted. Sometimes of a night she grew frightened when counting up her slender resources. If something did not turn up soon, what was to become of her?

"Ah!" said Mr. Mantrapper, "if you were regularly one of my pupils, you know, I could manage it all easily enough. Why not join my class, and begin in the right way? I guarantee an engagement as soon as ever you are perfect—and that will be very soon, you know, if you will work."

"What are the terms?"

"Five pounds a quarter, paid monthly in advance. What do you say?"

"I—I am afraid I cannot afford it," she stammered; "and you promised to get me an engagement without that."

"Not quite promised, I think; said I would if anything turned up. I can't make vacancies, you know."

"But supposing I joined your class, how would you get one for me?"

"Oh, that's different."

"Why so?"

But Mr. Mantrapper did not explain.

At last, however, there came a letter to say that there was an opening. She dressed herself very carefully, even invested in new gloves. She made her poor pale face look its prettiest, and tripped light-heartedly two long miles through the rain.

"Oh, it's you," said Mr. Mantrapper, coming out from his back room hastily, and displaying but little enthusiasm at sight of her. He had indeed been expecting someone else, someone he was waiting for to bring him some money.

"Yes," replied Ann, very graciously; "you wrote to me."

"I wrote—my clerk wrote—yes. Ah, that's filled up!"

"Filled up!" she gasped.

"Yes; you're too late."

"The note came by the last post last night."

"Ah, these things come and go in a moment; one ought to be always on the spot."

"And I have lost it, then," said Ann, in a trembling voice.

"Yes; lost that, anyhow. I'll tell you what I'll do for you, though: there's an opening in the ballet at the Great Sahara—it will be twelve shillings a week to begin with. You shall pay me half the first six weeks, and I'll ask for no more; I won't be hard on you."

"Me!—the ballet!" the girl said, with a flushed face.

"Why not? You've nothing to do; you'll be on the spot, too, in case anything else turns up."

Ann's rage was too great for a moment or two to allow her to reply. Then, as she bowed and moved towards the door, she said—

"I will not trouble you again, Mr. Mantrapper."

"I sha'n't be sorry for that, Ma'am," Mr. Mantrapper observed, when the shop-door had closed between them.





CHAPTER XI.

HINGS were beginning to wear an ugly look. Ann had changed her last sovereign. Her clothes were shabby, her boots worn out. The unusual fatigue of the last week or two had overtired her strength. The cold and exposure were beginning to tell on her. Her cheeks were very pale now, and somewhat pinched.

"What will become of me if I do not get the engagement very soon?" she asked herself. And supposing she were to get it, what could she do even then?

There are in all poor neighbourhoods certain good Samaritans who are willing to take charge of even the most trifling articles, and lend their owners the market value of the objects mortgaged. Here, over the same counter, the patrician jewel and the plebeian flat-iron make each other's acquaintance, probably to their mutual surprise.

Here its over-sanguine wearer leaves a watch for just five minutes, and returns never more. Here are warm overcoats deposited upon the eve of frosty weather setting in, with promises that they shall be fetched away again directly, and an extra fee paid for "the drawer," so as to save time when they are fetched, and to avoid the creases. But the frost sets in, endures long, and breaks up for spring, and yet the drawer holds its contents; and somewhere in another sphere, out in the wind, the coat proprietor makes the best use of his arms and legs to keep life in him, and pretends he is quite warm enough.

Ann could see one of these establishments from the

window of her bed-room. The legends of its painted doors and its golden symbols were quite familiar to her. She did not go there, for she thought it "too near;" but took a long walk in search of some other place less public. It was a very long walk before it was finished, and the shop she fixed upon at last, perhaps, more publicly situated than many others she had passed by.

Even when she had made her selection, and hastily entered, after casting a frightened glance around, she went in at the wrong door, and was obliged to come back again into the street, and go in at another, her cheeks flushing with shame; for she thought the whole street was occupied solely with her and her affairs.

The proper door found at last, and a trembling bargain made, she came out again into the street with downcast eyes and hurried steps, as though she had come forth from a prison with the prison stamp upon her, and was anxious to mix with and lose herself in the crowd. Before she had gone far, however, a hand plucked her by the sleeve. She turned and saw Frank Pickering.

She was so amazed at his daring to speak to her after the part he had taken in the base treachery Draper and he had practised towards her, that for a moment she was speechless. Then she thought perhaps he did not yet know that she had discovered all, and waited with some curiosity to know what he was going to say; while with a rapid glance she took in the details of his personal appearance.

Mr. Pickering's outward man was decidedly shabby. His coat was tightly buttoned up upon a greasy and ragged satin scarf; but at the corners close to his neck glimpses were obtainable of something of a very shady nature in the shape of flannel shirt, from which it was to be surmised that Mr. Pickering did not wear linen. His collar, which was a paper one, was much worn at the edges. He had on one dilapidated kid glove, and swung another, probably more dilapidated still, by one finger. He was generally threadbare and shiny and white about the seams. His hat was very glossy, in consequence of a recent drenching. He smoked the fag end of a cigar.

"Ah, I beg your pardon. How do you do?" he said.

She drew back and stood motionless, staring at him. Then she saw by his eyes that he knew she had found him out. He went on as though she had accused him.

"I should like to have a few words with you, Miss Whitaker, about this business."

She blushed deeply at the name. It was so long since she had been called Miss Whitaker.

"I'm very much ashamed of myself," he went on, "for the part I took in it. I really am; but I was in his power, you know. I was so hard up, and he had lent me money. I begged of him again and again not to ask me to do such a thing. It wasn't fair of him to take advantage of his power over me! It was a great shame!"

Ann still said nothing. What could she say? She turned away in silent disgust and hurried on quickly. In another moment Pickering was by her side. His boots were in a melancholy condition with regard to soles and heels, or rather, perhaps, with regard to the want of them, and he came upon her almost noiselessly, with a shuffling, sliding movement.

"You won't bear me any ill will in the matter, Miss Whitaker?" he pleaded. "I have suffered too—I have lost my situation. I have been awfully poor; I haven't tasted food for the last twenty-four hours. He has been a villain to both of us. I could tell you how to be revenged on him, if you'll promise not to pull me into the job too. I've got my way to make, you know, and can't afford to have my name pulled in. I expect to go into a business directly, which is a dead certainty to turn up trumps, and if it does

She came to a sudden halt, and faced him again.

"Will you please to go your way and let me go mine? I neither want your advice nor assistance. You have injured me enough as it is. Be content."

He dropped behind shamefacedly, as she thought, and she went on at a quicker pace; but presently he was again at her side.

"You could not lend me a few shillings for a day or two?" he said. "I really wouldn't ask you, but I am so hard up. For the love of God do so if you can! You know my poor mother—she used to be so fond of you—she is waiting at home expecting I shall bring in something, and I have not a farthing in the world."

"I have no money to give," said Ann through her teeth.

"Oh, don't say that. If it is only a sixpence. You must have something too. I saw where you came out of. If you

could spare me a shilling. I give you my sacred word of honour——”

She gave him a shilling, which he turned over with a dis-satisfied look.

“Thank you,” he said. “You can’t do any more, I suppose? Very well. Thank you all the same. Where do you live? I’ll bring it you back on Thursday.”

“No. 10, Plantagenet-place, Burton Crescent. But never mind. Don’t bring it to me; I don’t want it. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” he said, smiling, and shook her hand before she knew what he was about.

With tears in her eyes and her face aflame, she hurried on and got rid of him this time. Turning at the street corner to take a last look at her persecutor, she saw him entering the swing door of a public-house.

And now things were beginning to wear an aspect which daily grew more seriously alarming. She was already somewhat in arrears with her rent. She had one by one parted with her little stock of valuables. Her clothes were poor and shabby, almost too bad to go out in during the day.

She would not have now been too proud to accept a place in the ballet had she been able to obtain one; but it was too early for the Christmas engagements, and just at that time business at the theatres was very slack. Of course she had tried to get on at a country theatre; but there had been only one opening with salary, and there the money was far from sure, and the travelling expenses, without mentioning wardrobe, &c., very heavy.

At last she came to the conclusion that without money or friends it was impossible to get on unaided—a conclusion at which any person of experience would have arrived long ago. What then was she to do? She owed money now, and it was absurd any longer to allow her pride to stand in her way. She must communicate with James Jarman, and beg of him to take the necessary steps to enable her to draw the little income to which she was entitled.

She wrote a letter, and awaited the result.

Three days later, no reply having come, she was asking herself what course she ought next to take. She made a weary pilgrimage to Straggleton New Town, and made enquiries. Jarman had gone away, leaving no address. She made other enquiries in various quarters, but with a similar

result. Then she remembered that he was a member of the *Roughs Club*, and thither bent her steps.

She found the place with some trouble, and asked for her cousin. He had not been there for several weeks. He was supposed to be away in the country or abroad. As she turned away with despair in her heart, a light-haired gentleman of a florid complexion, and very gaily dressed, came singing up the steps. It was Jason Burgoyne, the author-actor, with a companion.

"Tra-la-la, tra-la-la," he sang, staring hard at Ann through her veil. "Have I the pleasure, or am I mistaken?"

"How do you do, Mr. Burgoyne?" Ann stammered, in some confusion. She was ashamed of her shabby clothes.

"Ah," he replied, "I was sure I knew your face—a—somewhere—at the—at the—"

"The Boudoir."

"To be sure. I was going to say the Boudoir. Been acting lately in any more of Addleton's pieces?"

"I have not been acting lately. I have been trying to get an engagement somewhere; but I am afraid—without friends—"

"I don't know why that should be, I'm sure, but so it is; and yet I am positively starving for talent—positively starving."

Ann thought to herself, if that were the case, here was talent positively starving for him. Why did he not take her?

"You want a chance—that's what you want," continued Burgoyne, as though making a great discovery. "You have the genius, and want the bringing out. You know some men on the press now, I dare say?"

"No."

"Your relations will pay something, I dare say?"

"I have been trying to do without that."

"Of course you have, but you can't reasonably expect to make a success out of genius pure and simple. Genius in a garret, my dear young lady, must have very powerful lungs indeed to make known its whereabouts. Fact is, we don't want genius now-a-days, do we, Skylights?"

"No; it's scenery, and scissors and paste. You ought to know."

Jason blushed, but laughed.

"You're right there. Judicious selection, eh? What's

the good of those fellows who cudgel their brains for originality? It's wasting precious time; it's doing nothing. Careful arrangement, with an eye to dramatic probabilities (quite a different thing to real life probabilities, my dear Sir), and stage effect; polish and finish. Then effective posters; and you'll live in a grand house on the proceeds. That's genius doing something. There's less laurel-wreath; but in other respects the results are more substantial."

With this Burgoyne ran up the steps, laughing at his own wit. Ann looked after him blankly.

"If ever there were an impostor," said Skylights, as he walked away; — "but there's one comfort—he knows I know it."

Ann returned home. What on earth was she to do now? She sat down in despair. The landlady knocked and asked for her rent. She would like it next day, or, she was sorry to say, she must thank Miss Mortimer to leave the lodgings.

Heigho! what an old story is this! But the story of human love, grief, passion, misery—have not all possible and impossible changes been rung upon it again and again since the arts of printing and authorship were first invented?

Here is our Ann in the same pitiful plight in which countless heroines have found themselves placed before her, and of course the same old threadbare denouement is approaching. At the eleventh hour there is to be heard the sound of horses' hoofs upon the roadway without, and the prince's voice clear sounding above the din of the raging tempest, bidding her be of heart, as hope and help are near at hand.

Worse luck, the writer of this history has not got a prince on hand, or a galloping steed, or a raging tempest ready; but is compelled to state that the rescue happened in a less romantic fashion:—Ann, left to herself when the landlady had taken her departure, reviewed the condition of her earthly belongings very dismally. She had nothing in the world to pawn except the clothes she actually wore, and her purse contained—one penny.



CHAPTER XII.

HERE are so many wonderful pennyworths now-a-days. Literary pennyworths, which would go a long way towards papering a moderately-sized room. Toy pennyworths, looking as though they must take a week of honest hard work to manufacture. Then a penny loaf at a cheap bread-shop, or a pennyworth of pudding ("spotted," is not it called?) is as filling a pennyworth in the food way as could be desired. Coals are to be bought by the pennyworth in some neighbourhoods (you may carry them away, if you like, in your hat or coat-tail pocket). As far as clothes go, you can anyhow buy a collar and pair of cuffs for a penny. Towards housekeeping, when you want to begin, a penny will buy your gridiron, or your pokerette. With regard to amusement, see what is offered to you—there are penny readings (only they generally cost upwards of twopence), there are tragedies and pantomimes at the fairs, wax-work, wild beasts, Albino ladies, living skeletons, giants, and what not, all to be seen for one penny.

But how to spend your last penny in the world—that was the difficulty in Ann's case! She was faint and weary, but she did not want to buy any food; she did not want any amusement, or clothes, or coals, or aught else that a penny could purchase. Her plight was a desperate one—a penny would not help her over her troubles. At least she thought not—but it did.

She made up her mind to make one last, desperate effort to find something to do, and resolved to go out and buy a

newspaper. Therein—who knows?—she might find a situation which would suit her. She hardly knew what; but she was hopeful. In most situations for women—notably, a scullery-maid's—an unimpeachable character is strictly necessary. For a tragic actress a character is not of such moment. Perhaps there might be a tragic actress wanted somewhere.

In a shop near Burton Crescent resided a little sallow-complexioned old lady, who kept a small library and sold periodicals. Of her Ann made enquiry; but found that the penny newspapers that day were all sold. There was, however, a higher-priced journal, which she could read for a penny, and this offer Ann readily accepted.

It was a large journal, containing several pages of advertisements, and as Ann looked down column after column, without finding anything at all likely, her heart grew heavier and heavier.

The old lady seated behind the counter at her needle-work peered through her spectacles at the sad young face of her customer, and seemed not a little interested in her proceedings. At last, with a sigh, Ann folded up the paper again and laid it down, and while she took out her purse her eyes still lingered on the print, but the tears rising to them dimmed her vision.

The little old lady's spectacles meanwhile were peering into the purse, where the penny stood out conspicuous in its loneliness. When Ann would have laid her money on the counter, she laid her hand upon the girl's arm.

"You've not seen anything that will suit you, my dear," said she.

"No—nothing," Ann answered, in a low tone.

"Then you must not pay me, my dear. I shouldn't like to take it. There, there, put it back."

And Ann put back the penny without thanks. She could not speak just at that moment.

She leant her hand upon the counter to steady herself, for somehow she felt a little giddy; and, bending her eyes upon the paper, bit her lips. And while she stood thus, strange to say—at this critical moment of time, when her future happiness or misery were trembling in the balance, through her tears she read, as though in letters of fire—

"ANN WHITAKER! If still in London, pray call without loss of time on Mr. Dadson, Solicitor, No. 2, New Inn."

A moment afterwards she had hurriedly pulled out her penny and thrust it into the old lady's hand.

"God bless you for your kind words," she cried. "It is all I have got—all. But I have found something now. God bless you!"

And she was gone; and she and that old lady never met again on earth: but the latter often told the story.

"I was sitting as I might be here, Ma'am; and she stood as you might be there, and says I.....and says she....." And so on.

Ann knew where New Inn was situated; and all the way there she repeated again, and again, and again, the name of Dadson, Solicitor, of No. 2. She was not very long in performing the journey, and reached the office just as a clerk was lighting the gas.

She feared that Mr. Dadson would have left his place of business before she arrived; and was inexpressibly relieved to find that such was not the case. But Mr. Dadson was engaged. Would she take a seat? She took a seat, and waited as patiently as she could.

There were two clerks shut off by themselves in a sort of pen—an old man and a young one. The young one was still lighting the gas. He was of a playful nature, and in a sportive mood. He made the gas flare up suddenly, and then turned it as suddenly out.

"What are you doing?" the old clerk asked, peevishly.
"What's the good of larking?"

"Who's larking?" the young one retorted.

"Come, come," said the old one, angrily, "light up, will you? I want to get my work done, and get off home."

Some more practical joking with the gas followed after this, and another remonstrance, and then the two clerks went on with their work. Ann listened to the ticking of the clock, and read the particulars of some sales by auction, the bills of which were wafered against the wall. They were all sales which had taken place long ago.

The young clerk began talking.

"How long's the old boss going to be to-night, do you think?"

"How am I to know?"

"Who's in with him now? The same party?"

"Of course he is."

"I hope he pays Dadson well for his time. He takes it out of him in that particular, don't he?"

"Yes, rather."

"He's been here twice a day at least for the last six days. I never knew such a fidgety beggar."

"Hold your tongue, can't you?" said the old clerk, and the pens went on scratching for some time without interruption.

"What does he want to find her for, I wonder," the young clerk began again. "There's a fortune hanging to it, perhaps. I wish some one would advertise for me."

Ann listened eagerly; but no more was said. The old clerk presently passed over to his young friend a paper which he wanted read aloud. In a droning voice, then, the lad began to read, and Ann heard a confused murmur of long words and long sentences, which seemed to her to have no beginning or end.

It was a weary time she had to wait, and she was very anxious. But yet she did not complain. Here in this office was her only hope. What was beyond?

She grew impatient at last; such a long while had passed, and yet her turn had not come. Was it possible that they had forgotten she was there, and had allowed Mr. Dadson to go away for the day without seeing her? He might have gone out by a back door.

When she reflected upon her desperate condition, this thought frightened her, and laying her hand upon her heart to stay its throbbing, she rose unsteadily to her feet. But at that moment a door opened at the end of a passage leading from the office, and footsteps were heard approaching.

"That's Mr. Dadson, I think," said the young clerk, and she turned to meet him. It was Mr. Dadson, a small gray-haired man, but there was another figure of a man behind—the figure of a man with a beard.

"Ann! Ann! At last!"

The figure behind had rushed past the little lawyer, and James Jarman held her in his arms—held her close to his heart—and kissed her pale face again and again.

"Why did you not come before?" he asked, breathlessly. "I have advertised a hundred times and more. I have searched everywhere. That vagabond Pickering gave me the address you told him. Number One, was it not, Plantagenet-place?"

"No," said Ann ; and she gave the number correctly.

"At any rate I asked at every house for you by your own name, and—and his."

"I took the name of Mortimer," said Ann.

"Then you have not given up all idea of the stage?"

"No, I—"

"You chose the same name you acted under that night. A name he chose for you, was it not?"

Mr. Dadson here interrupted somewhat impatiently,—

"Perhaps if you would step into my private room, Madam. In case any client should drop in."

The two clerks chuckled slightly at this. In truth the scene was scarcely one which could strictly be called official. As it was, Mr. Dadson had had a good deal of trouble in managing the eccentric Mr. Jarman's business. Certainly he had not bargained for this dramatic passage.

In Mr. Dadson's private room some, comparatively speaking, rational talk ensued, and arrangements were made for the future.

"You had better go to-night to a respectable hotel," James said. "Here is some ready money. I will call in the morning and give you the necessary authority to draw any sums which you may require in future. If you really wish to carry out the idea about the stage, I can be of service. I happen to know that Burgoyne could find you an opening at once."

Ann related what had occurred.

"I can manage it, I think," said James.

That very night, in the smoking-room at "The Roughs," he found Burgoyne in conversation with a slim, sharp-featured man, with a great quantity of wild wiry hair—Charker, the manager of the T. R., Yokeltown, where Burgoyne's new piece was to be produced, by way of testing its capabilities for the London stage.

"You asked me a week or two since for the address of the young lady who acted at the amateur performance at the Boudoir," said Jarman. "You wanted her services."

Burgoyne exchanged a glance with his friend the manager.

"That's true enough; I did."

"I have found her now."

"Yes; I saw her myself yesterday."

"Well?"

"I'm afraid now the chance is gone."

They talked for another ten minutes upon the same subject, and then the conversation had reached this point.

"If her friends would be willing to help her now," said Charker.

"With a sort of entrance fee of say fifty pounds," said Jarman. "Would you pay her a salary then?"

"A salary! That would be impossible."

"Not if her friends made it a hundred? In that case you might pay her five pounds a week for a couple of months, don't you think?"

And all three gentlemen laughed heartily at this droll way of putting it.

When Jarman called next day on Ann he told her that she was engaged to play a leading part in Burgoyne's new piece, "Autumn Leaves," which was to be produced three days hence; the reason for her performing so important a part at so short a notice being, that the lady who was to have acted the character had suddenly fallen ill.

"It's a splendid chance for you," said Jarman. "Are you satisfied?"

She pressed his hand in reply, and he hurried away to make a host of purchases which he said were absolutely necessary. She also had to work very hard; for she must leave London at latest by the midnight express. Charker came to see her, and his opinion upon the whole appeared to be favourable.

"You're not very strong, are you?" he said.

"I have not been very well lately."

"Well, don't you fall ill just now, you know, or we're clean done for."

"Oh no; there's no fear of that."

Throughout the day she rode about almost continuously in a cab, buying a great number of articles, a list of which had been prepared for her. When night came she went to the station, and waited for Burgoyne and Charker, who were going down with her. She was there about twenty minutes before the time the train was to start; but found that Jarman had got there a few minutes earlier. They walked together, arm in arm, to and fro upon the platform.

"Are you very tired and sleepy?" he asked. "What a day you have had of it!"

"It has been like a fairy tale," she said; "and you are the good genius. How kind and noble you are. What do I not owe you?"

"Would you ever care to pay me?"

"Would I ever? I will."

"No; the price I should ask might be too high."

She looked up at him in surprise. There was a strange tremor in his voice.

"What do you mean, James? You know such kindness as yours can never be paid. Is there anyone else in the world who would do as you have done, and stretch out a hand to help me? It does not signify that the fault was not mine; the world—"

"Who cares for the world?" he answered, passionately. "I have all my life had the world against me. What then? I have had luck in my favour. I am rich now, and care nothing whether the world hate or love me. But, Ann, I am very lonely—I am sick for want of one love—one that cannot be mine—one that has been stolen from me."

"I do not understand," she said in a flutter, slightly struggling to disengage her hand, and then closing it again upon his. "Yet I think I do. I am not worth this. You would regret it always. Let me go my way."

"Regret it! Not I, if you did not. See, Ann, the train is getting ready that is to take you from me. There are two lives open to you: one all lights, flowers, music, applauding crowds—for a few years, that is—but while it lasts, a magic life, fascinating, fatal, which will rob me of you—which will rob you of yourself; the other is a life of peace and ease—luxury, if you will—or of travel through strange lands such as you used to tell me you dreamt of in those days when you spent so many long hours in looking out into that lonely little street."

The passengers were hurrying on to the platform. The bell was ringing; all was bustle and confusion.

"Take your places, gentlemen—take your places. Going by this train, Ma'am?"

"No—yes—in a moment."

"Here is our star," cried Burgoyne's voice. "Come along; I've got a *coupé* all to ourselves."

"Burgoyne said you would not be in time," said Charker. "I knew you would though. You are a girl of energy, I can see, who means to make the world her footstool;

and by Heaven you will, if you try. You've got it in you."

"What do you say?" asked James.

Ann hesitated, stammered. "How can we break our promise now?"

"If you say 'Yes,' I'll do it in a moment for you."

She was silent. A thousand thoughts crowded at once upon her mind. Perhaps fortune and fame awaited her yonder. Here was her dream about to be realised. Should she let the golden opportunity go by? And if she became a great actress, was there not one who, hearing of her name, would—

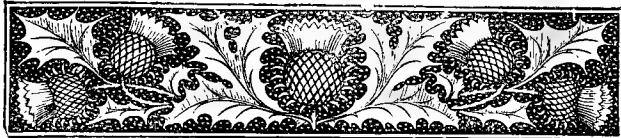
"Come, come, Miss Mortimer!"

"Come along; we're just off!"

"Will you give me a few hours, James? I will write."

He only pressed her hand in reply, and helped her into the carriage. The guard hastily closed the door, and the next moment the train started. The three travellers, looking back, saw Jarman still gazing after them until the broadening darkness shut him out from their view.





CHAPTER XIII.

HE members of the stock company of the Theatre Royal Yokeltown were not much delighted at hearing that Mr. Burgoyne was himself coming down to superintend the last rehearsals. The actors of the leading parts knew very well that there was no chance of their getting engagements in town to play the same characters. They were only, as it were, keeping the beds warm for the lucky ones. It was quite likely that Burgoyne might take it into his head to act the principal character himself, or else the manager in London would be sure to do so. The stage-manager here had some experience of him.

"You'll catch it, some of you," he said. "He'll tell you you don't do it right before you speak. I've known him be in the house on the quiet, in a dark corner somewhere, at a rehearsal, and nobody have a ghost of a notion he was there, taking notes of everything. Regular coaching himself up to come and pitch into us the first time he publicly put in an appearance."

Somebody in the orchestra at this moment snapped a fiddlestring.

"You'll catch it, too, some of you, when Mr. Burgoyne comes," continued the stage manager. "Mind my words if you don't."

When he did come they did catch it. Nothing was right. Everything had to be tried over and over again; and he ignored the poor stage-manager's previous directions altogether. Not only was all the business chopped and changed about, but so technical was Mr. Burgoyne's language, that

not one in a dozen, even among the carpenters, had the vaguest notion what he wanted done. Thus, instead of "Shut that trap," it was "Shore your O.P. trap;" and he was so learned upon the subject of floats, battens, wing-lights, and ground rows, the very gasman did not, as he afterwards remarked, know exactly where he was to a week or two.

The unhappy machinists, flymen, stagemen, wingmen, flatmen, and cellarmen, trembled in their shoes when they heard his orders, and wildly pushed and pulled at the scenery until everybody—author, manager, and prompter—deed them for dullheads in chorus.

It was really good fun to look on and see the vagaries of this irrepressible one when putting his brother actors through their paces. Your ordinary author, who is not an actor too, is generally a poor meek creature, who is afraid to make a suggestion; but Burgoyne knew all about everything, and was here, there, and everywhere.

One moment he was going up on the sloat—the trap or slide, by which fairies ascend to or descend from the clouds; then he was going through the "Corsican Brother" business on the scruto; and lastly he was down in the orchestra leading the band.

"Blow this sort of thing," said Brown, the second low comedian. "Everything's going to be cut out. If I'm not to have my hiccups in the first act, there's nothing else left in the part."

He was a genuine specimen of his class, was Brown. One who invariably took advantage of a serious situation to make the people laugh, thereby proving that he ought to be first low comedian in place of the gentleman whom the people did not laugh at. He usually made himself prominent in mobs, and was enormous in a comic "hooray." Put him in "Julius Cæsar," as one of the citizens, and he was sure to be immensely funny, consequently very annoying to Brutus or Marc Antony, particularly in the oration scene; but make him a citizen in a burlesque of "Julius Cæsar," and tell him he was to be funny, and he would throw a gloom over the whole performance.

There was a haughty walking gent — a provincial *beau jeune homme*, who called himself a *jeune premier*, because he thought the other title was not very dignified.

"Walking gent! Walking stick, I call him," said Bur-

goyne. "I'll cut out that man Brown altogether, if he does not tone down of his own accord. That White seems a modest sort of fellow. I'll get him up to town this winter."

White was the first low comedian, and he was subsequently taken to London as Burgoyne had promised. Here, at the Sahara, he met with the fate of other wags before him. His duty was to try to be funny whilst the audience were settling themselves in their seats, or while they were turning their backs to the stage previous to going home very much exhausted by the sensation drama occupying the middle of the bill.

The company generally were anything but satisfied with the parts allotted to them, and still less with the changes which were made in the parts they had taken the trouble to learn. Nobody, in fact, was in a very pleasant mood ; and Ann's reception was far from being a cordial one. Burgoyne was too busy, and Charker too excited, to speak to her. She stood alone in a corner of the dark stage, and waited with a throbbing heart for her turn to come.

It seemed to her that a rehearsal was much more trying than a public performance. It was a cold wet day ; and perhaps it was because of the cold she shivered. She had had very little sleep overnight, and had been too fatigued in the morning to study her part. It was a much longer part than she had thought at first, and contained a vast amount of business.

"Miss Mortimer ! Where's Miss Mortimer ?"

"Miss Mortimer ! Miss Mortimer !"

She was called at last, at a moment when she had not expected the summons.

"You ought to be there."

"No ; she ought to be here."

"She enters from left third entrance, doesn't she, Sir ?"

"No ; she doesn't. And if she did, she's not doing it. Stay ; that's wrong. Higher up. No ; lower down. Not that side at all."

Poor Ann ! No wonder she lost her presence of mind under these various and conflicting orders, and wished herself safe home again—anywhere, in fact, but at the Theatre Royal Yokeltown.

"The whole of the second act goes very flat," Burgoyne said, when the rehearsal was over. "We must have on the limelight at the finish. That'll improve it."

The second low comedian sniggered at these words, and whispered to Ann—

“That’s right. Limelight again! What would they do without it? Whenever a situation is a rightdown bad one, introduce the limelight and it’s a sure success, and never mind about its being likely—in a railway tunnel or down a coal mine—anywhere.”

“At any rate,” said one of the other actors, “I’m glad school’s broke up for to-day. I’m dead beat.”

“It’ll be worse to-morrow, though,” said Brown. “I’ll bet you, he wants everything done just the reverse of what it is to-day.”

Thus they separated ; and Ann went home to her lodgings to learn her part. She ordered tea to be brought up, and while it was being got ready lay down upon the bed to take half an hour’s nap. She fell asleep for several hours.

When she awoke, the thought that she had wasted so much valuable time made her nervous. How was it possible now that she could be perfect in her part by the next evening? If she sat up all this night she could ; but she felt that she had not strength enough for that. She would go to bed early and get up early.

She carried out her intention, but rose very little refreshed, after a feverish night. However, she sat down at once to study. After an hour or two she began to have a pretty good knowledge of the part. The words seemed to come to her more readily as she applied herself zealously to the task. The rehearsal call was at eleven. There were yet a couple of hours. Rap-tap.

It was the postman’s knock which had disturbed her. The servant girl came running up stairs with a letter. The envelope was in Jarman’s writing. Inside on a slip of paper was written—

“When your first performance is over, you will have time to think quietly. Then write to me.”

There was another letter, however, round which the slip of paper had been wrapped, and the handwriting was a woman’s. She opened the second envelope, and read there a few scrawled words within—

"MY DEAREST,—Can you ever forgive me? They say I am dying. Will you come and see me first?

"HARRY DRAPER."

Wafered up in the passage, upon which the stage-door opened, was to be read this announcement—

Saturday, October 15.

Ballet, Props, Supers, Scenes at 11.

Principals at 12·30.

The actors and actresses had assembled at the hour named, and the rehearsal commenced. When Miss Mortimer was called; she did not answer. Mr. Charker was inclined to be savage, but Burgoyne was anxious that the young lady should be treated kindly.

"Don't frighten her, for goodness' sake. She's mistaken the time, I suppose. Here, some one run and fetch her. Will you, White, there's a good fellow."

White found her, seated, as he first thought, asleep. An open letter lay in her lap, the copy of her part upon the floor at her feet. She looked up at him in a frightened way.

"What has happened—is he worse?"

"Who? What—Charker? He only wanted to know what had become of you. He was afraid you had run away again to London. Come along; they're all waiting. You know your part, of course."

"Yes, yes—nearly."

"Come, then. Where's your bonnet?"

She seemed as though she were coming away with him without making this addition to her toilet. The low comedian looked at her more earnestly, and spoke in a gentle voice.

"You have had bad news in that letter. That is the worst of our life, my dear. We must make merry when our hearts are sad. We have sold ourselves to the public, and

belong to the public. We must try and forget that there are any such persons in the world as Miss Mortimer, or Mr. White. We are the heroes and heroines of Mr. Burgoyne's grand new and original sensation drama, and must break our hearts only about the troubles he is kind enough to make for us. Is this your shawl? That's it. Lean on my arm, my dear."

They were waiting in great anxiety at the theatre, but no remark was made on the lateness of the young lady's arrival.

"Don't flurry her," said Burgoyne; "she's fresh at it, you know."

"I hope there won't be anything occur again like that you told me happened at the amateur theatre," Charker said.

"No, no. Besides, that was not her fault. It was the fault of the infuriated ecclesiastic."

"There's no chance of his bearing down upon us here, is there?"

"Not likely. We'll have the stage doors guarded by a strong body of police; and in the orchestra they shall keep drawn swords handy in their fiddle-cases."

But though they thus joked upon the subject, the two gentlemen felt anything but easy in their minds. The rehearsal passed off in a halting, jerky way. Ann read her part, and said that she would be sure to come perfect in the evening. The actors looked askance at one another, and smiled. Some of the actresses were not particular in how loud a tone they expressed their sentiments regarding the debutante.

Why should a nobody-knows-who be put in there over their heads? What experience could she have had? Not much, evidently. She seemed to be ignorant of the oldest stage traditions, and as yet she had shown no signs of histrionic talent.

Mr. Charker made no remark. "She's good enough, I dare say," he said to himself. Mr. Burgoyne was also of his opinion. He belonged to the new school for the levelling of actors and elevation of scenery. His plays were so constructed that, unless he acted in them himself, there was no leading character. Therefore utility people would do well enough for all the parts.

The rehearsal over, Ann went back to her lodgings and tried to study her part. But the words swam before her

eyes, and her memory failed her at every moment. How could she think upon any but one subject. He was dying, and had begged her to come to him.

Presently she flung down her book, and hurried to the railway station. There she entered the telegraph office and despatched a message to Mrs. Starkey to ask her immediately to send back word whether Draper was better or worse.

“When shall I have an answer?”

“By eight o’clock.”

She would then be on the stage.

“Send the answer to me at the theatre.”

She went home again and resumed her study. She had not sat down at it very long when Burgoyne called. He had been very uneasy when he came to think things over quietly after the rehearsal. Was there yet time to give the character to anybody else? Who could undertake it? He broke the matter gently, and the ladies to whom it was proposed, in a high state of indignation, offered a hundred objections to such a course.

The facts of the case, if the truth must be told, were not exactly as they had been represented. Charker had had some trouble with his leading lady, and for reasons of his own, wished to show he was independent of her. Upon her pleading a slight indisposition therefore at the first rehearsal, Charker had cut her altogether out of the piece.

“I’m going to give it to some one else,” he said. “No one here. A young lady of great talent and extremely elegant appearance. She’ll come back from town with me, I dare say.”

He had not the remotest notion who the lady was to be, but rushed up to London and consulted Burgoyne, and Ann turned up at a lucky moment. Burgoyne had entertained a somewhat similar idea of ousting some one from the London theatre, where his piece was afterwards to be produced, and he had thought of Ann, and therefore spoken to Jarman about her. The very night after Ann met the author, Charker made his appearance, and Burgoyne was regretting that he had neglected to ask her for her address, at the identical moment that James entered the room.

It would, therefore, be not a little mortifying to the manager as well as disastrous to the author if Ann failed; and yet they were now far from sanguine of the result.

Burgoyne was pleased to find her studying—at any rate to find her with the book open before her.

"Are you getting on all right?" he asked. "We expect great things of you, you know. You must not be frightened."

"Yes, yes, I will do my best, to be sure—to be sure."

She spoke in an absent way, however, and as though she scarcely knew what she was saying. Burgoyne went away less easy in his mind than he had been before he came.

"Perhaps she is all right after all," he said to himself, "and perhaps she does not know a word of it. One alternative is as probable as the other. Confound these women; there's no knowing what to make of them."

The hour for the performance drew near. Yokeltown has theatrical tendencies, and three theatres. Many new pieces are produced there; some written specially for the Yokeltown-folk, who are of a critical nature, and award praise only where praise is due. At six o'clock there was a good crowd at the doors. The people going to the pit and gallery were inclined to be noisy. The half-hour having gone, they began to bang loudly at the doors.

"Don't put them out of temper, for God's sake," said Burgoyne, who heard the noise from the interior of the theatre. "Why don't the fools open the doors?"

A moment afterwards the doors were opened and the sound of an army of thick boots was audible upon the stone stairs, accompanied by the chink—chink of the tin cheques, as the moneytaker rapidly exchanged them for the sixpences handed to him.

"There'll be a fine house, anyhow," said Charker, "but a mortal rough lot. I wish we hadn't tried it on a Saturday, under the circumstances."

"Why?"

"If that girl should make a mess of it."

"Oh, she won't."

"I hope not! I dare say Farquhar's got some of her friends in to hiss. She's quite capable of it." (Farquhar was the lady with whom Charker had quarrelled.)

"You've got in your own people as well, I suppose?"

"Oh, of course."

"There's not much strange paper though, is there?"

"None, I hope. It's dangerous to do much of that in a country town—even a large town like this. Everybody

knows everybody else, you see, and it would get wind. In London it's different."

"Oh, in London we have to manage the matter carefully too. If it's a frost at starting, we advertise crowded houses, and all that sort of thing, of course, and stick up a notice of no more room in the pit. We have done that often when there have not been five pounds in money in the house—all paper. But we never let the actors have any. We keep them in the dark as much as the public."

"So that when they want an order they get it second-hand from the public-house next door, or the cigar shop round the corner."

"Most probably."

There was a tremendous thumping and a loud hissing from the gallery. The orchestra, it had been arranged, should play five minutes earlier; instead, owing to some misunderstanding, they began five minutes later than usual. At last they came, and played their best. Nobody listened. The curtain drew up on the opening farce. The unfortunate Mr. White was as comic as he could be when there was so much noise going on that only a third of what he said could be heard. Then the curtain descended with mixed applause and hisses; and the audience got ready for the next piece.

A waiter from the principal hotel had come over late in the afternoon and engaged the last private box not disposed of. He had taken it in the name of Smith, and it stood empty during the farce. When the curtain rose upon the great drama, a dark-bearded man entered it and took his place at the back, so that it was very difficult to make out his features from the stage.

The music was playing now. Ann had come some time ago. She was dressed, and in obedience to the call, had descended to the green-room. White found her here when he presently came in from changing his dress.

"Well, how are you now? You look very nice. Feel more at home, now, don't you?"

"Oh, yes—a little excited. It is the music, I think, and I'm so fresh at it. I suppose the music does not excite you in that way?"

"I don't know. Just a little, perhaps. Take it coolly now. Speak up, and don't care a button for anyone."

"Thank you, thank you."

The first act was half over. It went rather tamely. A favourite appeared, and carried a scene through with considerable applause. Then came a hitch and loud hissing.

Charker came in front and begged for indulgence. There was applause at this; and then he said, that he was well-informed that there were persons present who had come in sworn to make the piece a failure. At this there was loud disapprobation. It was one of those rash ventures managers are so fond of, but which generally succeed. Burgoyne at the wing bit his lips.

"That Charker always was an ass," he muttered.

The favourite actor went on again now, and the low comedian made his appearance. A telling situation brought the act drop down, amidst general applause. One or two faint hisses from a back seat were drowned most effectually.

The second act opened weakly with a "carpenter's scene" and a long dialogue, in the words of which the actors were not perfect. Then there followed a stage wait. The discontented party grew louder in their demonstrations. The front scene gave place to an elaborate set piece for which there was great applause, and a call for the scenic artist. Then some lively business followed—a crowd well arranged, and then Ann entered from a bridge and came down front. The crowd gave way; the audience in dead silence waited.

Burgoyne whispered savagely,

"Why don't your people applaud?"

"The idiots," muttered Charker, and stamped his foot on the ground. Then nervously cried, "Go on, go on. Damn it, why don't you prompt. What's she stopping for?"

She *was* stopping. The prompter was prompting but she seemed not to hear him. Her lips opened, but she said nothing. She put her hand up to her face and seemed to stagger.

White was on the stage and approaching her gave her her cue again in an improvised sentence. The audience having waited patiently for a few moments, wondering not a little, began to laugh and hiss. One solitary person was heard to applaud but the hisses frightened him, and he desisted after a feeble effort.

"It's stage fright," cried Charker with an oath.

"It's idiocy," exclaimed Burgoyne. Some one standing by touched him on the sleeve.

"A telegram came for the lady just before she went on. It was given her at the wing."

The scene had somehow reached a conclusion amidst jeers and hisses and laughter. The curtain had fallen. That act at least was a failure. Ann had no sooner escaped from the stage than she fled to her dressing-room. Some one following in search of her found her with her head lying on the table, sobbing pitifully.

"What do they all say? I am disgraced for ever, and I have ruined them, have I not? Where can I hide myself?"

"Don't talk like that, my dear. There, there, don't be a fool. You must go on again."

"Again? impossible. I can never go on again."

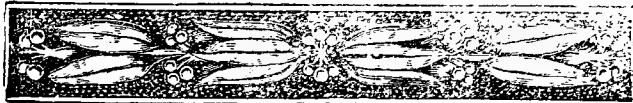
"No, no," a voice said. "No more, unless you choose. Put on your cloak and bonnet. You shall go away quietly with me if you wish. But why are you afraid?"

It was James Jarman who spoke—the Mr. Smith, of course, of the private box.

"Oh, James," she said, running to him for help and shelter, "it was not that I was afraid, but oh, so wretched! I have had a message. He is dying. He may not live through the night. How can I think of anything else at such a time?"

What a night of shame and humiliation to look back at! Would she ever be able to face the public again after such a disgrace? Yes, before long she shall appear again before a crowded audience, but of a different and even less indulgent kind. She shall appear in her own name then—and it shall be when she is being tried at the Old Bailey.

Now, the playhouse was left far behind, and she was speeding on her way across country to the little watering place where Harry Draper lay dying. Already she had no thought for what had happened—scarcely recollected it. One idea only occupied her mind,—would she be in time? Would he be dead before she reached him? Was there a hope of being with him if only for a brief hour? Was it possible that there was hope even beyond this—hope of renewed life in renewed love?



CHAPTER XIV

WHEN Tom Yolland returned from his unsuccessful negotiation with Draper's mother, he found the enemy in possession. Poor pretty little pale-faced enemy! She did not look very formidable, but he frowned upon her none the less fiercely on that account.

"That woman here!" he exclaimed to Mrs. Starkey. "What does it mean? How on earth has it come about?"

Mrs. Starkey, in a flutter, explained. Almost directly Thomas Yolland turned his back upon his friend, the poor gentleman began to get worse. He got very bad indeed. Mrs. Starkey became very frightened. Mr. Starkey said something ought to be done; and Mrs. Starkey asked the sick man whether he desired that anybody should be sent for, and thus the letter was written, which was the cause of Ann's not knowing her part.

Yolland returned, and walking straight up stairs, met Ann upon the first landing.

"Hush!" she said. "You must not go in."

"Not go in?"

"Not yet."

"Why?" blustered Tom. He felt that he had a right to be by his friend's bedside. What right had this creature there—there or anywhere else for that matter?

"He is fast asleep," Ann whispered, "and the doctor said he was not to be disturbed. Will you come again presently?"

"Oh, yes, I'll come again," said Tom Yolland, with a smile full of meaning—a smile which seemed to say, "You

will find me a tough customer, my lady, and not one very easily to be dealt with. You need not think to practise any of your tricks upon me, because it will not do. No! no! Have a care. Look out for yourself. It shall be a fair battle; but I give you warning there shall be no quarter."

He turned abruptly on his heel when he had spoken, and went his way again in a state of great indignation, and very much determined. Good soul, how often are we girding up our loins, the rest of us, to do battle with pasteboard giants and ogres of lath and plaster, giving ourselves the grandest airs imaginable, as though of Christian heroes of great prowess!

In the end, then, the enemy was left in possession triumphant. Not very triumphant, by-the-way, but yet having the credit of having played her cards very well, and being monstrously wily and designing.

Ann had found her lover very ill indeed—his state had been little, if at all, exaggerated. It was the opinion of the doctor that he most likely would not live out the night, but yet he had found strength to scribble down the few words which had been sent to her under cover to James Jarman. When this letter had been sent, he seemed to revive a little.

"I will live till she comes," he said; "I must see her."

They expected her next morning, then in the afternoon, then at night, but she did not come. Mrs. Starkey said—"She won't come in time after all," and she asked the doctor's opinion. The doctor gave one of those vague answers which are so professional:—"He may last an hour or two only—perhaps a week."

But the sick man seemed determined to keep his word. He would live till she came. She came before noon the next day, having travelled all night. She did not knock at the street door. Knowing how it could be opened from without, she turned the handle as she had often done before, and entered.

She passed up stairs noiselessly and without meeting any person, and opened the sitting-room door. The room was dark and silent, not a sound was to be heard within the sleeping chamber. She trembled and held her breath. Had she arrived too late?

But almost at the same moment that this thought occurred to her a low, weak voice called out—

“Ann! Ann! have you come?”

She ran forward and took him in her arms. She had forgotten all his treachery to her. The recollection only of the old love and happiness lingered in her heart, and she laid her pale cheek against his, wasted and haggard by illness.

An hour or so later it seemed as though her presence had brought back some of the old gaiety and sunshine which had been so long strangers to the invalid’s lodgings. She opened the windows, pulled back the curtains, sent out for flowers, and decorated the apartment.

She seemed to settle down quite naturally into the task of nursing—a work at which all women are clever when they love the person whom they nurse. She tasted broths and slops, and watched the clock face for the time to come when the medicine was to be given.

Draper lay very silent, but his eyes followed her restlessly when she moved to and fro, when she went and came again. He seemed afraid that she might once more run away and leave him. He would not go to sleep unless she sat by his bedside holding his hand in hers.

When he slept, two tears trickled slowly down his cheeks, and his lips moved as though in entreaty. He woke up gasping and frightened.

“I was afraid it was too late,” he said, hoarsely, “too late to repair the wrong I have done. Thank God, there is time! Ring the bell.”

She rang, and when Mrs. Starkey came he bade her go at once for the best solicitor in the neighbourhood, and beg him to attend immediately. Mr. Wainwright, from the Royal Terrace, came within half an hour, and Draper consulted with him for some time alone. After this interview the solicitor departed in a great hurry, bending his steps in the direction of the railway.

When Mr. Wainwright was gone, Draper called Ann to the bedside.

“You can never love me as much as you once did,” he said. “You cannot trust me the same.”

“I do not know what other women would do,” she answered, pressing his hand, “or what I ought to do, but I think I shall always love you.”

"Enough to marry me in reality?"

It presently appeared that Mr. Wainwright's presence had been required so that he might be consulted respecting the most expeditious mode of procuring a marriage license, and that he had departed to take the necessary steps, with instructions that no expense need be spared. It was not likely that either Draper or Ann would inform the people of the house what business was in hand, but somehow the news got wind—probably because Mr. Starkey had listened at the keyhole—and there was great excitement in the lower regions. Of course this conduct upon Draper's part raised him greatly in the estimation of the women. How noble was such conduct! (Noble to leave off acting like a scoundrel, and do what he ought to have done at first, did they mean?) How princely was the lavish outlay—for it was rumoured that the expense would be but little short of a hundred pounds.

Tom Yolland, had he been aware of what was going on, would probably have entertained very different opinions to these, but his literary business carried him at this moment, much against his will, to London, and there was no one by to thwart the machinations of the syren.

Thus one of the great sensation scenes of this little drama occurred during his absence. The marriage took place under the most romantic circumstances, by candle light, with closed doors, with frightened women listening on the stairs without. The clergyman's deep voice just faintly audible, now and then reached their ears, as also now and again a half-suppressed sob. It was more like a funeral than a wedding, and those who assisted without license upon the stairs crept away trembling when the room door opened, and the lawyer, the clergyman, and a third person who had been present came solemnly down to the street.

But the doctor's visit an hour or so later brought hope of happiness to come to one heart at least. He pronounced Draper's state to be slightly improved. He might even now get all right again if he were kept perfectly quiet.

"I feel much better myself," Draper said. "Why did you all try to frighten me? I shall not die after all—not yet. I have a great future before me."

She was sitting by his side. Her eyes filled with tears as he spoke, and she gently smoothed his cheek, smiling on him as she did so. But with a restless motion of his head he caused her to desist.

"Where's Tom Yolland?" he said. "I ought to see him. That affair must not be neglected. I've wasted time enough as it is."

There was not much difficulty about obtaining quiet just now in the little watering-place. There were no other lodgers in the house. The season was over, and the apartments in the house on either side stood empty.

The gay promenaders were gone—the fashionably-dressed young ladies and gentlemen. The great army of tag-rag had also departed—the nigger melodists, punch show-men, fortune-tellers, and the like. The band which had been engaged by the tradespeople for the summer months had gone too, but it had not yet broken up. Some of the seaside visitors recognised the old band again playing before their houses in town, but they did not reward the musicians with the same liberality as they used to do in the summer days upon the sands.

Only a few strangers remained in the town, and these were an unprofitable lot to deal with. Unreasonable persons eking out small incomes, haggling in an unseemly fashion over the change of even sixpence—actually living there for economy's sake. Everywhere there were bills of "Lodgings to Let" in the windows. The long-talked-of happy dull season was approaching when there was time for rest and pleasure, only the other season had been so bad. It was generally allowed that the season had been bad.

"We stood empty two months."

"We only had what you might call one good let."

"The place is nothing to what it used to be."

"The company is nothing to what it used to be."

"The seasons are all turned topsy turvy. There's no summer now-a-days."

It was generally supposed, however, that the Starkeys had done well. How was it then that Mr. Starkey took even a gloomier view of life than was his wont, and loitering longer than usual at the Benbow bar, drank deeper? It had long been understood that Mr. Starkey had got a lawsuit on relating to his wife's property. It was said, by those who were not numbered among Mr. Starkey's admirers, that the

suit had been instituted by Mr. Starkey to wrongfully obtain possession of property belonging to Mr. Starkey's wife's sister—a minor.

This action, after many turns and twistings of a wholly unanticipated nature, had concluded adversely to Mr. Starkey's interests, and it was a question whether in thus trying to get more than belonged to him he had not lost all he originally had. Mr. Starkey was evidently, on his own showing, in a bad way.

The town was certainly quiet enough now, and perhaps a little dull. The sea waves washed the shore to a sad music. A cold land-wind blew down the lonely street, drifting the dead leaves it gathered on its way upon the door-steps of the dark and desolate-looking houses.

Only a faint light glimmered here and there, and one of these was from the window of the room where all Ann loved on earth lay hovering 'twixt life and death.





CHAPTER XV

WILLIAM BRADSHAW lived in a snug little house near his chapel. He might have had a much larger house had he thought fit to do so, for his income was a very comfortable one; but he was careful withal and kept well within it. He had managed to save some money, and had invested it advantageously in the purchase of literary property. He was now one of the principal proprietors of the *Thirsty Soul*, to which he contributed some articles that were very popular.

There was much talk of a larger chapel being found for him. He was so run after now that the accommodation at the old chapel was wholly inadequate—people blocking up the aisles and crowding the door-ways. The low music hall company a few houses off were even tempted to pay Mr. Bradshaw a visit to ascertain what made him “draw so.” Some of the newspapers had begun systematically to write him down, and he was getting on famously.

If another chapel were found for him, or a new one built, he might take a larger house adjoining it, or if he had any family—for, as ought previously to have been mentioned, he had recently married.

He had been united to one of the daughters of that Mrs. Hodson whom we met at the tea-meeting described a good many chapters back. It was said to be a very good match. She was a very estimable young woman, somewhat long of nose and bony of outline; but in all other respects agreeable. They did not begin life as some other married couples do, as though matrimony were a game of play, as though they were children who had had a present made them of a new doll’s house.

Martha was from the first serious and orderly and economical. She quite naturally picked up the bunch of keys and glided into the household duties as though she had been all her life looking on, waiting for the place. The servants very soon found out they had got a mistress in the house, and, before a month was over, there were battles royal about the waste in the kitchen and the oglements of the libertine baker.

She made him a good wife, everyone said. She kept the house well on a surprisingly small allowance. Her servants feared and respected her. Her husband also feared her a little, and never indulged in a joke when they were alone. Nothing, indeed, could be more serious and improving than those evenings they spent together *tête-à-tête*. She asked him questions upon various points of belief. His talk at times took almost the form of a short sermon, and she would listen gravely, inclining her head at intervals over her teacup.

In due course she became sub-editor of the *Thirsty Soul*, and the terror of the "printers' devils," who, by-the-way, were not thus named at the establishment where that journal was set-up and machined.

There was, we can readily imagine, about as little "love nonsense" talked by this young couple as ever there was by any married couple who did not exactly scratch and bite each other at the end of the first four and twenty hours. Perhaps William did not desire that sort of thing. Martha, with all her good qualities, was not one of those women men make pets and playthings of. She loved her William as a good wife ought to do, and for nearly a year after their marriage kissed him regularly when he entered or left the house.

At all times she was solicitous for his comfort, and warmed his slippers in the winter time. She was even a little jealous. Once or twice she frowned very darkly upon such female members of her husband's flock as pressed around him at the tea-meetings, and once or twice, when occasion offered, she stabbed him sharply with needle-pointed epigrams upon the subject of that love affair of long ago with that "mountebank girl;"—so Ann was spoken of in the Hodson family, where the fact of the amateur performance had become known.

Was William happy? He was growing fat, at any rate,

He took very kindly to his meals, and rode when he went his rounds, instead of going, as heretofore, on foot. He was looked up to as a king in his little circle, and morning, noon, and night he heard his praises sung by many voices. It was heavenly music, sweet to listen to.

That affair of long ago ! But, after all, it was not so very long ago as regards actual time. Not more than a year ! Yet what a long while since it seemed. He had made such strides in life. He was so much more famous, and so well married.

After all he had done well in shaking himself free from the Whitaker connexion. No good could have come of it. They would have dragged him down. As for the girl, if what he had heard had any foundation of truth, he had had a lucky escape in breaking off the marriage.

One morning, when he was seated at breakfast, there came a knock at the street-door, and the servant brought him in a card on which he read the name of James Jarman. He put down again untasted the cup of tea he was raising to his lips, and leant back in his chair. Mrs. Bradshaw, looking round the tea-urn, saw how uneasy he appeared, and asked what had happened.

“ Nothing ! nothing ! ” he replied impatiently, and rising, left the room. When he had passed through the door, Mrs. Bradshaw jumped up and looked at the card.

James Jarman was waiting in the study where he had been shown by the servant. He was standing with his back to the fire, and had not taken off his hat. He did not take it off now, but, with his hands in his pockets, nodded towards his cousin.

William, without nodding, took a chair, and waited for the other to begin the conversation ; and while he did so, he made a critical survey of Jarman’s general appearance. He was not shabbily dressed, but so carelessly that it had almost the same effect as shabby clothes. He wore a large ragged beard, and his hair was long and untidy. There was, too, a wild, haggard look about his face. At the first glance, William fancied that he was either mad or drunk.

“ You’re surprised to see me, I dare say,” he said.

“ Yes,” said William, shortly.

“ I should not have called on you if I could have helped it. We have not seen much of one another since I came

back, have we? Well, our paths in life lie in opposite directions; but for once they come together."

"Will you take a chair?" said William.

"No. You can guess, I dare say, why I am here. It is about Ann."

William made an impatient gesture. The other continued—

"Do you know what has become of her?"

"I do not wish to know."

"I can understand that, but you must. A cursed villain did her as great wrong as man can do to woman. With a mock marriage——"

William rose abruptly with an expression of disgust.

"That is her version of the affair. Of course! Of course! One of the mock marriages of romance—at least, what I am told are put into romances. I do not read that class of book."

"There is no occasion for half the words you are wasting. What I tell you is the truth, and not what she says. When she found out how she had been cheated she left him, and being ashamed to apply to me or to you——"

"To me, indeed!"

"To me then—she was reduced to the greatest misery. She would, I believe, have perished for want had I not accidentally discovered her."

"I saw the advertisements. They were sufficiently public, I think, as indeed have been many other details connected with this most disgraceful business."

"This man Draper has—how, I know not—persuaded her to go back to him."

"Easily persuaded, I dare say," sneered William.

"Easily or not, the fact is there. As you observed just now, the details of the case have already been too public. But will the publicity end where it is? If the circumstances of the case, and your relationship, become known to your congregation, what then?"

"Become known," said William, with a start. "Who would dare?"

"Who can say? Clearly it is best that the matter should end at once. She must be brought back again."

"How? we cannot force her?"

"No, but we can frighten him. He is a poor weak fool. It is your trade to coax and frighten. Suppose you go to him."

"I have met the man once," said William, after a moment's silence. "I am afraid that good words would be thrown away upon him."

"But you might try, and if persuasion fail——"

"Well, what then?"

"You are much the stronger of the two, and in your place I'd beat him to death with my walking-stick."

"I think you're mad," said William.

James laid his hat upon the table, and wiped his face. "I dare say," he said in a low voice. "I suppose it is something of that sort," and there was a silence of some moments.

"I do not see how I can interfere in this matter," said William, presently. "My interference might only lead to some unpleasant publicity, and cannot possibly do any good. If you will take my advice, you also will let the affair rest."

"And is that the religion you teach?" asked the other, bitterly. "Save sinners as long as you can save them without danger to yourself. After all, why should I be surprised. I suppose yours is a business the same as any other."

William moved towards the door.

"We need not prolong this interview, I think."

"No, I think not," said James, and walked straight out into the street without another word.





CHAPTER XVI.

AS soon as Mr. Thomas Yolland had finished his business in town, he made up his mind to go back to his sick friend, and see what was to be done. There was a very determined look about his square-cut mouth as he marched down the hill leading from the railway station to the lower end of the town, where Draper's lodgings were situated.

There was something about the look of his eye which seemed to indicate that he meant to stand no nonsense from anybody.

Nor did he. Therefore, when he arrived at Starkey's house, he opened the street-door himself, and marched up stairs unannounced. His heavy step, as he crossed the little drawing-room, roused Harry Draper, who was at the moment asleep. "Is that you, my darling," he asked.

Tom Yolland's lip curled at this term of endearment. "It is I," he said, presenting himself at the foot of the bed.

Draper regarded him with a very blank expression of countenance, and coloured slightly.

"Oh, it is you, is it? What a while you have been away."

"I hope I've come in time."

"In time? Oh, yes. I'm much better, the doctor says; he has great hopes of me."

"I did not mean that. When I left you I was afraid you were in danger of something else besides death. Look here, Draper, are you well enough to bear a long talk? I really want to speak to you seriously."

Draper looked somewhat uneasily towards his friend. He

fancied he knew what the other would say, but he was silent.

"It is about this connexion, Harry. Unless you would blight all your prospects, it *must* be broken off."

"You mean if I accept this appointment?"

"Of course you will do so, if you ever regain your health."

"Oh, I have no fear of that; I shall be quite well soon—in a week or so—but—"

"But what? There can be no great difficulty in doing what I say."

"Yes, there is, more than you think."

"Leave it to me. If you place the matter in my hands, you may make your mind quite easy as to the result."

Draper was silent for a moment.

"They all made out I was so much worse than I really was," he said, in a complaining tone; "I was forced into it."

"I can understand that. She should never have been allowed to know you were ill at all. Women know their power at such a time; they are all alike, designing, calculating; I know them well."

"It was unfair to frighten me—a sick man."

"It was very unfair, but luckily there is no harm done."

"What?"

"Don't be alarmed, Harry, but leave it to me, as I said before. If she really cares for you, as she pretends, she will sacrifice herself for your sake; she will not try to drag you down. Ah, don't tell me; women have often made these sacrifices where they have truly loved."

"What, the designing ones?"

Tom Yolland saw that there had been some sort of contradiction in his argument; he hit on another tack, for he was fully determined to save his poor friend, as he thought. It seemed to Tom Yolland, from the Tom Yolland point of view, that this passion was in all respects mean and vulgar, but it occurred to him that perhaps, after all, he was not going quite the right way to disgust Draper, even allowing the possibility of the existence of any high feelings and sentiments on the part of the enemy.

"Look here, Harry, I can't recognise you for your old self a bit in this business; you used not to be the sort to be talked over so easily by a chit of a girl. I've heard you

swear a score of times you would never love seriously. Why, you were always such a lawless sort of fellow. You seemed to snap your fingers, as it were, at all the little weaknesses flesh is heir to. You've quite frightened me many a time."

Draper smiled with infinite self-satisfaction.

"Who says I'm changed?" he asked. "It's not fair to criticise a man who's down on a sick bed. You see the girl's been very loving and devoted, and all that sort of thing. I'm obliged to make her some sort of return; I couldn't really be hard on her."

"Of course not; I never would have suggested such a course; but there are many ways in which a man of your position might show his gratitude to a woman in hers. I was afraid that you really were seriously in love with her."

"Seriously in love!" said Draper, with his old laugh. "You ought to have known me better. Of course I love now as I have loved before a score of times—no more."

But close upon his observation followed a sort of sob or cry of pain from the drawing-room beyond, the door of which stood ajar, and Yolland rose hastily to see who might be listening. As he approached, however, a light step fled before him. He followed to the head of the stairs and looking down saw Ann.

She turned upon the landing and looked up at him with a dull fixedness in her eyes. He called to her but she made no answer, and passed quickly downward and out into the street.

"That woman would like to thrust a dagger into me, I know," said Yolland to himself. "It was awkward she should have heard what she did, but after all perhaps it is for the best. The thing must really be broken off."

"Well," said Draper, when Yolland returned, "who was it, the landlady or the landlord?—I know he listens."

"No, it was neither."

Draper started up into a half-sitting posture, with a look of terror.

"You—you do not mean——"

Yolland nodded. "Yes, I do."

Draper fell back and clasped his hands over his face. Then struggled up once more, and gasped in great excitement—

"Go for her. Fetch her back! Do not stop to talk to

me, I am a pitiful liar and fool ! She is really my wife, and I love her more than all the world ! ”

Tom Yolland was rather slow in obeying his friend’s commands. He wanted further explanations and directions. When at length he reached the street she was nowhere visible. He walked some distance to the right and to the left, and looked about him, and made enquiries, and eventually bent his steps towards his hotel.

Here, it being the hour for which he had ordered dinner, he partook of it, and over his solitary meal pondered long and deeply. Perhaps, after all, he thought to himself, he had better leave Harry Draper to go his own way. Perhaps, after all, he might have been a trifle too officious.

“ As he is married there’s an end of the matter. He’s a fool, that’s all.”

While Mr. Yolland was yet sipping his wine, a face he knew passed the window—a thin, dark face, with a bushy beard. A minute or two afterwards a voice, which was also familiar to him, was heard enquiring of a waiter in the passage without for the address of a Mr. Harry Draper. It was, of course, James Jarman.

Yolland watched him from the bow window of the coffee-room—a window which commanded a view of the straggling High Street, and of Paradise Place in the far distance. He saw him walk at a brisk pace to within a dozen yards or so of the house, and come to a stand-still to stare up at it from those railings on which Mr. Starkey during the season had smoked so many pipes.

After lounging here awhile, instead of entering the house, he turned away and took the direction of the sands, and presently descended some rugged steps hewn in the chalk of the cliff.

When Ann had left the drawing-room an hour or so previously it was in this direction she had turned, and very soon was lost to view behind an overhanging rock. Thus Yolland had missed her. The steps led down to a wild part of the shore which was but little resorted to by the visitors. It had the character of being dangerous, for the flood-tide often overtook unwary wanderers and cut off all hope of retreat. Several people had been drowned here.

Here among some scattered masses of rock the sea rolled in across a flat beach with surprising swiftness even in calm

weather, and when the weather was rough the waves dashed over them tumultuously with a mighty froth and bluster, towering mountains high. But just now it was low tide. A broad waste of wet, black sand lay stretched out towards the sea. The sun had set. The sky was dull and leaden of hue. Not a living soul was to be seen—not a sail upon the sea, or a bird in the air: not a sign of life, except the one lonely figure of the despairing woman sitting among the rocks.





CHAPTER XVII.

JHEN James Jarman left William Bradshaw's presence he went straight to the railway terminus from which the trains started that in the merry seaside season took those shoals of pleasure-seekers to the little watering-place where Draper lay ill.

The season being over, however, few trains ran there now, and James was told that he would have full three hours to wait. He did not, as he probably would have done at any other time, go away and return again at the proper time. He had nowhere to go, or nowhere he cared to go to. He had not eaten or drunk that day, but it did not occur to him to go and eat and drink. He sat down upon the nearest seat and resolutely made his mind up to sit there till the three hours were over.

A boy selling papers on the platform offered him one, but he refused to buy. It seemed to him that there could not possibly be anything in any paper in the world he would care to read about. The boy held in his hand an enticing list of contents. A royal marriage, an earthquake, a horrible murder, an important article upon the last political crisis! What was all this to him? He smiled and said, "It's not worth a penny."

The boy did not argue the point. Perhaps he also was of that opinion, and wondered at the taste of grown-up people. At any rate he went his way and left Jarman at peace. He sat therefore a whole hour undisturbed, seeming to watch the bustle of the platform, but really watching nothing—seeing nothing—scarcely thinking.

For he had formed no plan of action. He had vaguely

said to himself that he would go down and bring Ann away. He would somehow persuade her to come, but he had no idea how. He had not prepared a word to say. He tried once or twice to think of an argument, but could not do so. He would think of one when he saw her. That would be time enough.

Only an hour of the three gone yet. He rose and wandered to and fro, dreamily staring before him. The railway guards wanted to know whether he was "going on." The man at the bookstall made excuses for pushing against and squeezing in before him; he stood there so long without making a purchase, perhaps blocking out intending purchasers. He hung about so long and so suspiciously that the railway authorities began to form conjectures respecting him. He was either a detective officer or a pick-pocket.

He wandered out into the street during the third hour, and paused upon the steps of the station, gazing about in the same listless fashion. As is customary when anyone with a decent coat upon his back comes to a standstill in the street, either to think over his own business or trouble, or talk to a friend about his, at least half a dozen street hawkers and vagrants came up and told their tales, sang the praises of their wares, or whined for halfpence. He scowled some of these off, refused others, and turned away from the rest. A wan-faced woman came up last, and dropped a dismal courtesy, murmuring indistinct prayers. He turned upon his heel, and re-entered the station.

Looking back, however, he saw her still standing gazing very wistfully in his direction; but as he looked she turned and crawled onwards despondently. Upon that he hastened after her, and feeling in his pocket gave her the first coin that came uppermost—a sovereign. She gazed from it to him, holding it out in her hand, very much astonished, as well she might be, and asked whether he had made a mistake.

"No," he said; "why?"

She then began to cry and bless him; but he turned on his heel more savagely than before. She still followed, however, wishing him all earthly happiness and happiness beyond. He then faced about in a great rage, for people were staring at them he found.

"Confound you," he said, "go away." So she went.

During the last half-hour of his waiting he went to the

refreshment bar, and drank a glass of wine. While he was there a friend tapped him on the shoulder. James turned and stared at him for a moment doubtfully, not remembering who he was.

"You recollect me, don't you, Jarman?" said his friend. "I recollect you quite well. We very nearly had our throats cut together one night in the lower town of Quebec."

A veil of years fell from before Jarman's eyes. He stretched out his hand and shook the other's warmly.

"I remember!" he said. "We both of us almost finished our lives in company on that occasion. What have you done since?"

"I have been knocking about a good deal since; making and losing money."

"On the whole have you made more than you have lost?"

"Of course I must have made it first to lose it."

"That does not follow, does it? Where are you going now?"

"Of all places in the world to What's-it's-name-Super-Mare."

"Of all places in the world, I am going there too. It is a matter of five years since we last travelled together, is it not? Why not travel together now? For the last time perhaps—who knows? Life is so short, and the world so wide."

"Not wide enough for us to pass on this side of it without meeting one another, I'm glad to say."

"Yes, you are right," said James thoughtfully. "The world after all cannot be very wide that our loves and hates should be centered in so narrow a circle. We cross and re-cross each other, brought together again and again, as though by fate."

"You don't object to smoking if I remember rightly," said his friend when they had taken their seats in the carriage.

"No; let us smoke. It's a cheap luxury."

"Not that your cigar looks a cheap one."

"No, not very. I have no other way of spending my money."

"And you have been lucky, eh, Jarman? You were lucky in old times."

"I have always done the wrong thing as everybody thought

(myself included), and it has generally turned up the only right thing. I have prospered by the neglect of good advice and the waste of 'golden opportunities.' My greatest successes have arisen out of my own negligence. It is because I have all my life been ignorant, idle, and lucky that I have somehow made a fortune. I speculate because it amuses me, and I generally win."

"I've heard of your good fortune. Suppose now you were to speculate for me!"

"I might lose your money. There's no rule in the game, and, after all, the only stake I ever prayed to win I lost."

"What stake was that?" the other asked; but James made no reply. With the old dreamy look he was gazing out upon the seemingly endless marshes, through which the train was swiftly bearing them. Out there, spread about very far apart upon the swampy meadow-land, were dreary little homesteads, poverty-stricken and forlorn in aspect, showing no signs of life. Leading from there to who should say where, were long straggling roads, on which no travellers were visible.

A desolate region it seemed, well nigh forsaken by man, and yet on a swing gate near which the rails ran there was a couple making love and kissing. What couple were these whom the dreamy passenger thus looking out upon saw thus for the first time and the last? Who was she? Who was he? How long had they loved, and did they love each other very dearly, and would they go on loving each other evermore, or presently quarrel desperately and part for all eternity?

He thought then with a bitter smile of the course of Frank Pickering's true love, and with a sigh of his own journey and its object.

He found Ann on the sands. He had caught a glimpse of her slight figure among the rocks below, and descended the steps to speak to her. She was not crying as he had fancied at first from her attitude; for her head was resting on her hand, in which she held a pockethandkerchief tightly clutched. She did not hear him coming, and he obtained a view of her pale face and dull lustreless eyes gazing out towards the sea.

He came towards her softly—the sound of his footsteps upon the sand drowned by the moaning of the wind—and laid his hand upon her shoulder. Then she turned and saw

him for the first time, but did not seem startled by his sudden approach.

"You here!" she said, quietly. "How can you continue to care for anyone so unworthy, and after the way I have treated you?"

"It is because I love you," he answered, in a broken voice; "because I hope still against hope."

"There is no hope now."

"Why not?" he asked, passionately. "Oh, if you knew what a poor fool and shallow rascal this is you have wasted your love on—if you could see him with another's eyes—if you knew how basely he had acted, and for what a contemptible motive—so childish—so puerile—so—"

She put her hand upon his mouth.

"Do not talk like that," she said. "You can tell me nothing I do not know. You cannot dream how much at this moment I—I hate him!"

He caught her in his arms with a glow upon his face. But she shook herself free in a sort of angry terror, and ran towards the steps. He overtook her, and gained possession of her hand. Thus they stood for a moment, both breathless. The coming sea rolled and tumbled in the distance with a low dull roar. It seemed like some strange music accompanying this strange scene.

"Ann—Ann, I was wrong. I was a fool to speak against him. After all, what have I to urge in my own behalf? What can I say except that I shall always love you—love you with a deeper love than it is possible for another to feel, for my love is a life old. Oh, Ann, how can I persuade you? I cannot find words to say half of what I think. This is the moment, I know, when I should be using every argument, when—"

"No, no!" she said; "you must say no more. I am afraid I have been a fool. I see that now only too plainly; but it is too late for discoveries."

"Too late!"

"Yes, yes," she cried. "Too late!—too late!"

And following these words, which were uttered in a kind of wail, came a wild burst of sobbing, and she ran swiftly up the steps, leaving James Jarman silent and motionless, at their foot. As she disappeared he turned, and noticed that the night was falling fast, and that the roar of the coming sea was coming nearer and nearer.



CHAPTER XVIII.

AHEN it was quite dark, there came a knock at Mr. Starkey's house, and a gentleman asked to see Mr. Draper. He was told that Mr. Draper was very ill in bed, and had been so some weeks, and he seemed much surprised. He then asked if he could see Mrs. Draper, but was told that she had been out all the afternoon. He said he would like to wait for the lady, and was shown up stairs.

Left alone in the drawing-room, James threw himself into a chair, and rested his aching head upon his hand. Presently a moan from the next room attracted his attention. The door stood the least in the world ajar. A light was burning within, and he could steal a peep at its interior, unobserved. He rose, and went on tiptoe to look in.

There on the bed lay the man who had come between him and happiness. He was asleep, and a lamp burning near at hand threw deep shadows upon his face, which made it look more hollow-cheeked and ghastly even than it did in reality. His hair was long, and scattered wildly upon the pillow, contrasting strongly with the whiteness of his skin. So worn and emaciated did he seem, it was difficult to recognise any trace of the gay hearted, roystering Don Cæsar of the Boudoir Theatre in his feeble frame and wasted features.

And this was the man whom she loved so fondly—who had only to raise his hand and beckon and she would follow. If what he had been told were true, it was more than doubtful that he would ever rise again from his sick bed.

"The poor gentleman has had a relapse since the lady went out," Mrs. Starkey had said; "and his friend Mr. Yolland has gone for the doctor. I'm very much afraid for him, Sir. The doctor said if he had another attack it might be fatal."

As Jarman stood there watching, the sick man's head rolled to and fro uneasily, and his thin hands stretched forth upon the coverlet, clawed at it with restless fingers. He was delirious, or talking in his sleep. The listener caught vague snatches here and there.

"I must go on to night. They're waiting for me. Has the music begun?"

He was at the amateur theatre, and another histrionic triumph awaited him. He was beating time now to some imaginary air, and nodded his head, and laughed faintly.

"Yes, yes, Tom; I understand perfectly. I'm not a fool, you know. I'm worthy of better things than this. I must not throw myself away."

Jarman smiled bitterly. "Here's a thing to talk about throwing itself away."

"Yes, yes; I know exactly the sort of life I shall shine in. It is fortunate it has not gone too far. It must be broken off."

He was silent for a moment, then laughed, and then the wasted hand approached the mouth, as though to twist the moustache in the way which had been so popular in the Don Cæsar performances.

"I know all that of course. From one point of view, of course, I am a villain. It is true, I have spared none. It was very cruel of me; it was indeed! I have led a fearfully wicked life."

The smile of contempt still played about Jarman's lip as he listened, but he could only hear a portion of these mutterings. Presently the tone of the sufferer changed altogether, and he began to plead pitifully for some one's mercy.

"I'm a pretender," he said. "It's all a sham. I know you must despise me, but do not tell everybody. Promise me you will not tell. I have always told lies, and played the fool. I did love her really. It was to keep up my character. If I had not been ashamed——"

He muttered a broken sentence or two after this, and then subsided into total silence. James came away from

the door and flung himself into the chair. Thus he sat waiting for about half an hour, and then in a voice louder and more distinct than before, the sick man awoke him from his reverie by calling "Ann, Ann!"

He raised himself and listened trembling.

The sick man called again,

"Where are you, Ann? Ann, my own darling, come and give me something to drink. Oh, I am dying with thirst. It is cruel of you to leave me to suffer like this all alone."

He seemed to speak naturally enough this time. He was not talking in his sleep. James Jarman rose and again approached the door, hesitated for a moment, and passed in.





VII.

OUTSIDE THE OLD BAILEY.

CHAPTER I.

THE news that things were not going on as satisfactorily as could have been wished with Mr. Starkey soon spread among the inhabitants of the little watering-place, and Mr. Starkey's old friends looked shily at him when they met him in the parlour of the Benbow or in the street. Since the lawsuit had been decided against him he drank rather deeper than usual, and was, if possible, more insolent and offensive in his manner towards mankind generally. It therefore occurred, not unnaturally, to Mr. Starkey's old friends that as he had no money to stand treat with and no conversation of an agreeable character to offer in its place, it was scarcely worth while putting up with his insults. Starkey, therefore, was sent to Coventry.

While in Coventry he drowned his sorrows in a bowl at his own expense, and staggered home late at night to beat his wife—a way he always had when in liquor. One particular night, when he was not quite as tipsy as usual because he had not quite money enough for the purpose, and when he had for the same reason returned a trifle earlier than was his habit, he found great excitement prevailing in Paradise Place, and more particularly at Number One.

“Oh, Mr. Starkey,” said a female neighbour, meeting him a few doors off. “Oh, so dreadful! The poor young gentleman, and the poor young lady!”

“What has happened to them?”

What, indeed! There were all sorts of conflicting rumours

abroad. One at least was dead ; perhaps both. Mr. Starkey pushed his way past the little crowd with an air of authority and entered his house. Mrs. Starkey met him in the passage, in tears, and gave him a hurried account of what had happened. The gentleman up stairs had had a relapse, and while the lady and Mr. Yolland were out had breathed his last. The lady, when she returned and found what had happened, had taken on in a way which was dreadful to behold. She had screamed and cried like one distracted.

The doctor who had been sent for to see if anything could be done, stayed to render what assistance lay in his power to the lady, and fortunately, a relation of hers—who had called earlier in the evening to see her—had now come back again and volunteered to keep Mrs. Starkey company in sitting up to watch her, lest she might die for want of help in one of the series of fainting fits she had been seized with.

While Mr. Starkey and his wife were yet talking the doctor came down stairs and recommended the latter to keep a sharp eye on the patient, who in her present excitable state it was not really safe to trust for a moment alone.

"I am afraid, from what I can understand, there was some quarrel between her and her husband just before he died."

"I thought they were on such good terms," said Mrs. Starkey.

"Not they," Mr. Starkey interrupted. "There was a screw loose you may depend on it. I saw her come out of the house this afternoon, and by the look of her face it was plain enough to see there was something wrong. He was a bad lot, Sir, you may depend upon it."

"How so ?" the doctor asked ; but Mr. Starkey contented himself by smiling mysteriously and shrugging his shoulders, which was a favourite custom of his when profoundly ignorant upon any subject, or when he wanted to give importance to some infinitesimal scrap of knowledge he chanced to have picked up. The doctor, a plump, rosy, simple little man, stared at him in surprise, made little out of the examination, and took his departure.

"A disagreeable, underhanded sort of fellow that," he said to himself as he walked away, and half an hour later had forgotten Mr. Starkey's existence.

When the door was shut behind him, Mr. Starkey had

more to say:—"It's all very well this sitting up, and nursing and watching. Who's to pay for it all? We can't do the Good Samaritan business, you know. We have our own troubles to attend to."

"Has anything fresh happened?"

"I don't know about anything fresh. Something will happen very soon, you may be sure of that. I'm just able to ward off the smash from day to day; but it will come. Your precious relations will sell us up before many more hours have passed over our heads. Mark my words if they don't."

This danger threatening did not however deter Mrs. Starkey from the performance of the kind office she had undertaken. She was very weary from a long day's work and the excitement and confusion of the last few hours, but she spoke not of her fatigue.

Ann had been put to bed in a room on the ground floor, where, as the night had turned cold, a fire was lit, on either side of which Jarman and the landlady seated themselves, and prepared to keep watch. It proved to be a dull business enough, and Mr. Starkey did not volunteer his help, but retired early to rest, and that not without complaining that he should have to sleep alone at the top of the house with a dead body in the room below.

This dread presence also made itself felt in the room where the watchers had taken up their posts, and seemed to lend an unwonted gloom and silence to the whole house. As they sat there hour after hour, they could hear faint noises from without—the murmur and splashing of the sea against the wooden breakwater opposite. Now and then the howling of a dog—at rare intervals a heavy footstep in the street—the tread of a passing fisherman going to his boat.

Within the room the suffering girl lay at times so perfectly motionless and quiet, she might have been dead. A kettle simmered and sang upon the hob, and an old-fashioned watch upon the mantelpiece ticked loudly in a little Gothic edifice, where it hung suspended from a nail beneath an archway, guarded by two little soldiers with drawn swords. Now and then some slight sound, at the moment inexplicable, occurring within the house itself, made the watchers hold their breath and listen.

When she had been keeping watch about three hours, the fatigues of the day began to tell upon Mrs. Starkey, and at last she nodded her head and slept in her arm-chair. Jarman opposite to her, still kept watch. The young widow at that moment was sleeping tranquilly. He alone, of all the inmates of the house, was awake. He sat and listened to the sufferer's regular breathing, glancing at frequent intervals at the face of the watch upon the mantelpiece, which marked the slow progress of time. Once he rose, and going noiselessly towards the window, gazed forth upon the sea, over which the day was just beginning to break.

Presently Ann turned her head quickly upon her pillow, and begun to mutter some incoherent words, and to throw out her arms. She was dreaming or delirious.

"I killed him—I killed him," she cried; "I hated him so, I killed him. Yes, it was I."

She had half started into a sitting posture as she spoke these words at the top of her voice. Next moment James was by her side, pressing her firmly back, and holding his hand before her mouth, as though to hinder her from speaking again.

"Hush! hush!" he whispered; "what are you doing? What are you saying?"

She leant back, and was silent, and leaving her James Jarman stepped up to Mrs. Starkey's side and held the light before her eyes. The worthy landlady was fast asleep, and far from dreaming that she was in any particular danger.

When she awoke an hour or so later, day had broken; the fire had burnt low, and the candle sputtered in the socket. Ann slept more tranquilly, and James Jarman, more wakeful than ever, faced her from the other chimney corner, looking very gray and grim and haggard.



CHAPTER II.

THE little doctor had prescribed a composing draught for Ann, and the long sleep thus induced, had had a beneficial effect. When she awoke she was calmer, and more reasonable. She was, indeed, so calm and self-contained, the lookers marvelled a little at the change, and Mr. Starkey drew a moral when he heard of it.

"That's how it always is," said he, "they weep and tear their hair the first five and twenty minutes, and then it is all over, and we're forgotten." It would, however, have been somewhat difficult to forget a husband of the Starkey sort.

James Jarman took his departure early in the morning before the landlord had left his bed, so that as yet these two had not met, nor were they indeed aware of each other's existence. When Ann opened her eyes she opened them upon the sad, silent figure of her cousin keeping watch. He came towards her, and gently took her hand in his.

"Well, Ann?"

"Are you here, James? You must not stop here," she said with a shudder.

"No, I only waited for an opportunity of speaking to you. Here on this card I have written my address. Within a week I shall hope to see you. We will talk then of the future."

"She took the card he offered her, but made no reply, and without another word they parted thus. He slowly

ascended the hill to the Royal Hotel, and there having made enquiries about the trains, ordered some breakfast. Whilst he was waiting for it, the friend with whom he had made the journey the day before entered the room. At sight of James he came forward, eagerly.

“Jarman! The very man I wanted to see!”

“How so?”

“I told you yesterday I was coming down here upon a spec I thought might turn out well for me. It has turned out badly!”

“That is a way specs have of turning out. Well?”

“Eighteen months ago I brought back with me to this cursed country a little fortune of twenty-three thousand pounds. Of that sum I have the odd three thousands remaining. From your talk yesterday it seemed to me you were heartily sick of England, and the life you were leading here.”

“Yes, I am going away for ever in a few days!”

“Going where? What say you? Put in the same amount of money—a trifle to you—and join me in a venture out there in Mexico. I know you will like the scheme that I can lay before you. It is better than any I ever had. What say you to the old free life again? We were so happy together once upon a time.”

“Was I ever happy once upon a time?” said James with a smile. “Well,” he added after a pause, “I won’t give you a promise yet; but it’s not altogether unlikely. How long can you give me to decide?”

“Why, Jarman,” cried the other, seizing his hand, “do you really mean it? Will you really come? Choose your own time, of course. I proposed the thing, it is true, but hardly hoped you would agree to it.”

“The chances are I shall,” James Jarman replied, without any manifestation of excitement. “The next few days will decide all.”

“You know where to find me when you have made up your mind. And now, are you going up to town?”

“Yes, I want to see my lawyer at once, I have a good many things to settle.”

“I see you are going to have breakfast. We will breakfast together, if you are agreeable, and we can go by the same train.”

As, after the meal was concluded, there was an hour to

spare, the two gentlemen strolled along the High Street, and stared into the shop windows, to pass the time away. A poor show of wares were those exhibited in the small tradesmen's windows in this watering-place, even in the full season, but now only a few odds and ends of the summer's stock remained. Nevertheless Jarman saw a leather pocket-book that took his fancy, and they went in to buy it.

The tradesman came forward with great alacrity to serve them. The article in question, he said, was a bargain. It had been ordered by a nautical person, and had been procured with great trouble from town. The nautical person, after several visits, had gone away the day before the pocket-book arrived, and it was therefore thrown upon the shopkeeper's hands.

"It's worth double the money it's marked at, Sir," he said. "The gent was most particular about it. When it's closed this way, you see, it's waterproof. You might, begging your pardon, Sir, be drowned, and be under water for a day or two, and yet any papers in this pocket-book, if you had it on you at the time, would come out as dry as a bone."

While they were in the shop making this purchase, two suspicious-looking men, both, however, decently clad, looked in at the door, and one asked the shopkeeper to direct him to Paradise Place.

"It's down the street, right at the bottom, on the left. Who did you happen to want?"

"The name of Starkey. Do you know it?"

"Oh, certainly, that's number one—right opposite the breakwater."

"Starkey," said James, as he put away his purchase in the breast pocket of his coat. "I've heard that name before. Where was it now? Oh, I remember; it was long ago."

The two suspicious-looking men went their way, as directed, and reaching number one in due course, knocked at the door. The door being opened, he who had knocked immediately put his foot and leg into the passage to prevent the door being closed again, and asked for Mr. Starkey.

Mr. Starkey appearing, it seemed that there was a claim against him for a trifle over two hundred pounds, which one of this couple wanted to know whether he was going to pay. Mr. Starkey replying, with a dismal laugh, that he did not think he had any intention of doing anything of the kind, the speaker informed him that he should leave his friend in charge, and having done so himself took his departure. Mr. Starkey's troubles had then commenced in earnest. This was the smash of which he had been for some time past in daily expectation.

The smash having come, he left Mrs. Starkey "to have her cry out," and went down to the Benbow to drown his own care in his own way. He was some time thus occupied, and it was late in the afternoon, when he turned his face again towards home. In front of the door he found standing one of the flies from the railway, loaded up with boxes. At first he thought his own goods and chattels were being moved away.

But this impression was quickly banished by a lady's calling to him from the coach window.

"Oh, if you please, my good man."

Mr. Starkey replied, somewhat resentfully :

"What can I do for you, Ma'am ?"

"Does Mr. Draper live here ?"

Mr. Starkey looked hard at the lady, in whose face he thought he could trace some likeness to his late lodger.

"He did live here."

"Has he gone then ? Where to ?"

Mr. Starkey looked up at the sky and down at the pavement, as though uncertain upon this point, and bit his thumb.

"Are you a relation of Mr. Draper's, Ma'am ?"

"I am his mother."

"You haven't heard what has happened, then ?"

"Happened ? Oh ! my poor Harry. Let me get out."

There was a dark, good-looking gentleman, with very fine whiskers, sitting in the fly with Mrs. Draper, upon the opposite seat.

He spoke now for the first time, interposing in a soft and persuasive tone, and gently possessing himself of the lady's wrist as he did so.

"We must not agitate ourselves. We must be calm and brave, and prepared for anything."

Mr. Starkey told his tale in the style peculiar to him, putting the worst construction upon things. He supposed that he and Mrs. Starkey would never get any return for all they had gone through on the poor young man's account—the sleepless nights they had had—the long hours of watching—the toil and anxiety. He owed rent, too, for some weeks.

The lady alighted and entered the house, sobbing. Mrs. Starkey joined her shortly:

"How did my poor boy die? When was it?" Mrs. Draper asked her.

"It was last night about nine when the young lady came back, and he must have been dead then. She sat, she said, for some time in the drawing-room—nearly two hours—thinking he was asleep, and that he would wake and call for her; and at last, finding he did not wake and call, went in to look at him."

"How strange she should stop away from him so long, when she knew he was so ill."

"Very strange, I think," Mr. Starkey observed, parenthetically.

"I think," Mrs. Starkey continued, "that the lady and gentleman must have quarreled during the afternoon."

"Where is this woman? Who is she? My son was not married."

"He wouldn't marry her, that's why she went away and left him," said Mr. Starkey. "When she heard he was ill, though, she came back and forced him into it. They were married by special license. He was so ill at the time, he could hardly make the responses."

Mrs. Starkey would have interrupted—"Oh, I don't think that, dear——"

"Hold your tongue," replied her husband. "You know nothing about it."

"What doctor attended Mr. Draper?" asked the strange gentleman, who had accompanied the lady into the house, and who it appeared was a doctor also. "I must see him at once. I should like to put some questions to him. If you will take my advice, my dear Madam, you will take up your quarters, for the present, at the hotel."

"But I must see him. After what I have suffered

coming over. Ah ! I feel that I shall never recover this shock."

"As your medical adviser, I must forbid you, Madam, to excite yourself any more at present. I must beg of you to come away at once."

Mr. Yolland was yet in the town, and came to the hotel, where Mrs. Draper had put up, to narrate such circumstances as he was acquainted with respecting his friend's last hours. With some reluctance he related the principal points of the conversation he had had with Draper, which Ann had overheard.

"When I gave this advice," Yolland hastened to add, "you will, I trust, believe that I had no idea your son was married to the lady."

"Married !" cried Mrs. Draper, in great excitement. "I do not believe that the marriage was legal. Who was present, I should like to know ? We have all heard of these designing creatures."

Mrs. Draper's medical friend here burst into the room. He was trembling, and white with rage.

"What is the matter, Doctor Francis ?"

"I have never been so insulted in all my life," he replied, dragging off his gloves, and flinging them into his hat, as he spoke ; "I have called upon this fellow—this low provincial apothecary. The man was not even civil. He wished to know by what right I interfered ; but I will show him that. It was easy at a glance to see how wholly incompetent the creature was ; but I'll let him see whom he has got to deal with. I am resolved on the part I shall take in the matter."

Later on, Mr. Yolland and Doctor Francis had a few words together.

"The whole business seems to me extremely suspicious."

"Suspicious is a strong word," said Yolland.

"Not too strong. But this is premature. We shall see after the examination."

"Examination ?"

"Decidedly. After the post-mortem examination."

Was it possible that the few words Mr. Starkey had let fall carelessly could have led to the brewing of such a storm, for a storm *was* brewing—a raging storm, to which one life at least will fall a sacrifice ?

"I'd like to set them all by the ears, curse them!" said Mr. Starkey.

"Why?" his wife asked.

"We've got our troubles, haven't we? Why shouldn't they have theirs?"

"But they have, dear!"

"Oh, yes, I dare say. I shouldn't wonder now, if, before a month's over, the two women are hard at it, tooth and nail. The old one will want to throw over the young one's claim. But she can't do that. For that matter, she was safe enough while he had lived, even without the second marriage. He would never have dared to pretend the first a sham one. I would have shown her how to manage it, but she would not take my advice."

"I hope they will not be able to cheat her out of her share of what property there is."

"Why so? I do not see that it's any business of yours, or mine either. They could only do it though with our help. If we proved now that he was of unsound mind, and had been so ever so long."

"But he wasn't."

"Wasn't he? Well, if he wasn't, what of that? I don't know that he wasn't though, yet. I shall see what turn things take, and then I'll give my opinion. I'm sure I don't mind which way it is myself."

Late over night a message had been sent to an old woman living in a back street of the town; and very early in the morning she had come, and in a stealthy and noiseless fashion, which had something horribly suggestive about it, performed certain offices in the darkened chamber up stairs. This creature had also swept up and tidied the dead man's room at Mr. Starkey's request, and brought down in her hand a dust-shovel full of litter. Sorting this over in her husband's presence, Mrs. Starkey said,—

"Here's a piece of paper with some writing on it. What's it about, I wonder?"

Starkey snatched it.

"Let me see."

It was a half-sheet of note paper, on which only a few words had been written in straggling and uncertain characters, which were difficult to decipher; but Starkey

changed colour as he read it, and rising, approached the window, keeping his back turned on his wife.

“What is it, dear?”

“What’s what?”

“The paper.”

“Oh, nothing—nothing. You never told me——”

“Told you what?”

“Nothing.”





CHAPTER III.

ONCE roused, the energy of this Doctor Francis seemed to be without bounds. He was heard raving loudly against the low provincial apothecary in the public room at the Royal. That fellow had better have a care. He (Francis) was not to be trifled with. All in good time!

The country doctor meanwhile went upon his rounds, dreaming of no danger. When he heard from a friend that there had been "a doctor from London up there at the 'Royal' pooh-poohing his medical skill," the good old gentleman only smiled.

"My patients know me by this time. I've brought half the parish into the world. I suppose I've not made more mistakes than my betters. Perhaps he wants to come down here and settle. He won't find it a very good spec, I'm afraid."

The old gentleman went home that night and told the story to his wife and daughters over his glass of port. He thought it, in the innocence of his heart, to be rather a good story. He little dreamt what was coming.

As the sagacious reader may have guessed from the first, that man Francis was, to a certain extent, a charlatan and impostor. He was not very clever professionally; but he was a great schemer, and though as a rule aiming but at paltry results, threw so much artfulness into his game, that he frequently came off victorious—for a time at least. He had not come from London as stated above, but from the French watering-place, where Mrs. Draper had been living

for some months past. He had sold his practice and was going to London with the intention of settling there, and called on his patient to inform her of his intention. The prospect of a travelling companion decided Mrs. Draper to go and see her son, and as the doctor had some few days to spare, he proposed to accompany her to the sea-side, and to give his advice in the case.

Some people said that he had other views with regard to the widow, who was reported to be tolerably well off. Perhaps he wanted to see whether the son was likely to live, and if so what sort of person he was ; or whether he was likely to die, and if so to whom the money would go. Arriving in the little watering-place he had at once taken a great fancy to it. There was only one doctor there—an old man. There might be a chance for a young one.

Perhaps the old doctor suspected his intentions when first they met. There was of course no reason why every information should not have been afforded him respecting all the circumstances attending Harry Draper's illness and death ; but the enquiries had been put somewhat insolently, and the old gentleman's anger was roused. Had not this been the case the truth would never have come to light.

Tom Yolland could not help feeling a little surprise at the marked antipathy Mrs. Draper manifested towards her son's widow when he recollects the letter the former lady had written. "How was it she had changed her opinions so decidedly?" he asked himself. In the first place, however, he reflected that she was naturally suspicious of all surrounding the loved one who had died. Starkey's ill-natured words had helped towards the result. Presently came the damning proofs.

When the scared hound flies panting past with frothy mouth, lolling tongue, and bloodshot eyes, a howling crowd yelling "mad dog !" at his heels, which of us pauses to enquire whether the beast is really as mad as its pursuers suppose? To escape from its reach or to strike it dead, what other thought have we regarding it? When the post-mortem examination had taken place,—when the little scraps of evidence had been gathered together—when Yolland's story had been told—when the first whisper of foul play and poison had gone forth, who doubted the guilt of the culprit?

Even before the proofs were deduced the rumour had gained ground in the town. In the public room at the Royal it had been talked over. In at the Benbow it had been discussed. There never before had been a murder at this little watering-place. A man had killed another in a stand-up fight in a little village a mile and a half away, but that happened thirteen years ago, and then it was only brought in manslaughter. There had not been so much general excitement, even at regatta time, for many seasons past.

Having no other topic to converse upon, the landladies of the empty houses met together, and lengthily discoursed upon the subject in front of their tradesmen's counters. The fishermen gathered together in knots at the street corners. All day long a little crowd might be seen gazing up at the front of the house.

The local police were in a state of the highest indignation. A detective and two London officers had come down. These had given themselves great airs, and pooh-poohed local authorities and traditions. The magistrates of the borough and of the county had come together, and got by the ears over the business. There was a talk of the trial being moved to London. Some of the well-informed ones repudiated this intelligence with contempt; but eventually it turned out to be correct, for the trial was removed to London, on the ground that owing to the prejudice prevailing against the prisoner in the district, it would be impossible to have a fair trial there.

A month had now passed since Harry Draper died. The house stood damp and desolate in Paradise Place, destined perhaps to stand empty for many seasons to come, for clearly it will henceforth be an ill-omened house, and an unlucky house, which no prudent person would venture on taking. All good folks shudder as they pass it now, and many will not pass it after dark.

That window over the balcony, the broken window, is where she used to sit among the flowers. There's a broken piece of one of the very flowerpots lying there now if you doubt the story. Her little white hand used to steal out among the flowers and wave adieu to him as he walked up the High Street. He whom she waved adieu to lies buried yonder in the graveyard on the top of the hill. The hand she waved was the same hand that poured out the poison.

Only a few weeks ago, and that was the lightest and brightest house of the row. It has been shut up only a few days, and it looks as though it had been deserted for months. One or two blades of the straw which was used in the packing up of Mr. Starkey's goods and chattels still cling persistently to the doorstep. Where are the Starkeys gone? Over the way are the rails Mr. Starkey used to sit on so long, and on which he smoked so many pipes. One rail is bent with Mr. Starkey's weight. The paint is worn from a lower one by the friction of his boot soles. Yes, there are Mr. Starkey's marks, but where, oh! where is Mr. Starkey?

When the female neighbours talk it over they have a hundred and one anecdotes to relate respecting the inmates of the Starkeys' drawing-rooms. There was always a something—it was difficult to say what, but a certain something—about her nobody had liked. Some had always suspected she would turn out badly; some had seen the crime foreshadowed in her face; others had shuddered in her presence.

What of him who lay there dead in the little churchyard yonder? So handsome a gentleman! so light-hearted! so free spoken, so generous of his money, so noble too to atone for his fault upon his deathbed, and to render her so grand a reparation!

What a change! Here is the street that used to be so gay, now sad and silent. There is the sea the ladies used to bathe in, smooth as a duck-pond at that time, or rippling gently beneath the summer's sun, now black and boisterous, thundering in upon the crazy woodwork of the pier, and eating its way into the chalky cliffs which then stood high and dry above high water-mark. Yonder, No. 1 shut up and left to the ghosts and the rats; the hero dead and buried, the heroine a prisoner in Newgate.



CHAPTER IV.

HE sun rose much as usual one December day, which was a day of great importance to certain persons in this history, and lighted up the ordinary London street-life in its customary fashion.

The shops were opened about the usual time. People went about their business, made arrangements about their dinner, and felt in their usual spirits. There was no visible difference in the density of the traffic upon Ludgate Hill or in Cheapside. Round and about Newgate prison the public houses were not quite as full as on some busy market-days. There were a good many policemen standing about, and some bustle among the barristers, their touters and attorneys, about the doors of the court. A few more idlers than common loitered about the Old Bailey, and now and then among them might be seen a pale, wistful face—the face of a friend of one on his trial within, for to-day the Sessions were sitting, and it was a question of life or death for some inside those walls.

There are some cases which, owing more to accident than any peculiarity of their own, excite a large share of public notice. On these occasions the court is often crowded, and the seats available to the public eagerly appropriated; but very rarely is there even half the excitement in a real trial which invariably characterises the trials of romance. There is so much else to think of, how are we who are not upon our trial to remember when the case comes on. Why, there are some people tried and condemned, with more or less justice, and hanged out of the way, and we none the wiser,

because on the days that those events were recorded we did not happen to read the newspaper. Just at that period many important events had occurred to engross the public mind—war, a general election, fierce political strife. Upon this account, perhaps, the reports of the proceedings hitherto had been very meagre. Many details which might have provoked curiosity had been omitted. The world at large knew very little of Harry Draper's murder, and of his wife's trial for the crime.

Some of the idlers in the street without were not aware that a case of such importance was coming on. Most of those who had business on hand regarding cases in the court, even though those cases were only trivial ones, were so engrossed with their own affairs, they had no time or inclination to think of others. A sallow-faced man, with a ragged beard, who was wandering vaguely round the prison walls, had some difficulty in ascertaining whether there actually was a trial for murder about to take place, and where it would occur. Whilst he was himself looking for the court door, a rustic-looking stranger came up and asked if he could point out the spot where the "chap were hung." Replying in an absent manner that he did not know and passing on, the man with the beard, a minute afterwards, found the rustic stranger still at his elbow.

"I be coom oop to Lunon to see th' soits like, don't 'ee see. I be coom into a bit a brass and 'ud loike to spend it on a lark."

If anything, perhaps, the rusticity of the stranger was a trifle overdone, and strongly suggestive of skittle-grounds and sporting wagers. The other turned away impatiently and hurried on. A few yards further on he met an old man with a profusion of gray locks hanging down upon his collar. He was carrying some papers and pressing forward absorbed in his own thoughts.

"Mr. Drake."

"Ah, Mr. Jarman."

"What is going on? How's the case likely to go? Has anything fresh occurred?"

"Nothing fresh—nothing done yet. We may hope for a favourable result."

"May hope? You said an acquittal was certain."

"Of course nothing is certain in this world; but I think I may say nearly certain—next to certain."

"You know, Mr. Drake, I told you when I came to you at first why I came. I was recommended to go to the cleverest Old Bailey lawyer in London; I knew you were the man, and came to you."

Mr. Drake, grinning at the intended compliment, but wincing somewhat at the way in which it was put, hastened to reply.

"I hope you did not do wrong, Sir; I'm sure we lose very few cases from our office, and we have a deal of business—a great deal. Hi, Jeff!"

The person so addressed was a little foxy man, carrying a blue bag tightly crammed with papers. He came running towards them in answer to his name.

"Have you seen after Saunders's case?" said Drake, "and Williams's? Here's something for you to attend to at once. Go back to the office and fetch Pledger's affidavit."

"Yes, Sir,—"

"Stop; what have you got in the bag? let me look."

They were standing in a passage leading into the court when this dialogue took place. People were pushing to and fro past them. Some of the papers that the lawyer was sorting were knocked from his hands by some rough person passing by, and scattered on the ground. Jarman looked on, scowling with impatience while the documents were picked up again.

"I am afraid you have too much other business, to attend to mine," he said.

"Why, my dear Sir, yours will be attended to all in good time. Pray make your mind easy—do make your mind easy."

"That is easy enough to say. This suspense is unendurable."

"But there is really no cause for alarm."

"You really mean that the result must be favourable?"

"I have not a doubt of it."

The other groaned. "Why did I leave it as long as this? There was only one course to pursue: I ought to have done it long ago."

"My dear Sir, you seem very excited; that is natural of course; but pray try and compose yourself. Suppose now you go to my office, and sit down and wait. I will at once communicate the result."

With these words, Mr. Drake was for running away again

having by this time collected together his scattered papers, Jarman caught at his sleeve.

"My dear Sir," said the lawyer, "I—really—my dear Sir—" and he tried to disengage himself from the other's grasp.

"One moment," said Jarman, tightening his hold, and speaking in a low, earnest tone. "You have other cases on to-day; you did not tell me that. I depended wholly on your help—your undivided attention to this case."

"But, my dear Sir—so unreasonable a request—so unprofessional—"

"Chut! Listen to what I have to say. I told you you were to spare no expense."

Here Jeff the clerk interrupted.

"Williams's case is on, Sir."

Mr. Drake shook himself violently loose.

"I must go, upon my word. Really, I protest!"

But once more the other had him tight. "There was something really dangerous about the look of the man," the lawyer afterwards explained when describing the scene; "a sort of subdued ferocity. I was really almost alarmed."

If the truth must be told, the worthy gentleman was alarmed in reality, and without any further effort abandoned himself to his fate, and listened to what Jarman had to say.

"I told you not to spare any expense," he continued, "and to obtain the best counsel that could be procured.

"I did so. Samson was not able to take the brief, as luck would have it, or Sergeant David. I got Goliah, though. After David he is the next best."

"No matter what you did. So far it seems there has been nothing but bad luck. I don't say though that it is your fault. All I say is this—I want your undivided attention, and now tell me in one word what sum will make it worth your while to throw everything else over, and give me your whole time for the day. Name the sum and I will write you out a cheque."

"Never since I began to practise," Mr. Drake said, when telling the story, "did I hear so monstrous a proposition. Of course I could not listen to it."

* * * * *

"My dear Sir! Really, this way of treating the matter!

Of course, if you are willing—in the shape of a retaining fee, as it were—but if I could only persuade you to be calm. There is a pen and ink at this desk. Mr. Dawson, could you oblige me? Thank you—thank you."

* * * * *

"And now, my dear Sir, you really must be calm. Our case is on the next. Will you come into the court or wait here? Wait here—that's right. Now I will come back to you directly, if you will only promise to be reasonable."

"I will be as patient as I can," the other said. "If you knew what I suffered!"

"But you must be calm," Mr. Drake urged. "Consider, my dear Sir, what can your sufferings be to hers?"

Where Jarman stood, just outside a door leading into the court, he could hear the confused murmur of the voices within when the door was closed, and every now and then catch a few disjointed sentences when the door opened. Sometimes when the voice of one of the witnesses was low, it was altogether inaudible without. Then again, when the business of the court was suspended, there was a general whispering, which presently the voice of the usher quelled. The case was a short one, and easily disposed of—highway robbery and attempted murder—several previous convictions—penal servitude for life.

Some of the spectators from the court passed out at the door. Two barristers, one coming out, one going in, met in front of him, and talked together.

"What's on next?"

"Murder!"

"The woman down at that sea-side place, who killed her husband, isn't it? They'll soon settle that."

"Yes, I should think so. No case. Wonder they found a true bill; but they must acquit her."

They passed on their different ways, and Jarman heaved a sigh.

Just at his elbow a remarkably long-winded old man was telling a friend an interminable story. Throughout the whole time that Jarman stood there waiting anxiously this story continued, and involuntarily he found himself listening to snatches of it.

"It was just this way, you see — the man either did commit the murder or he didn't. It was all a question of time and place. If he were at a certain place at a certain time it looked black against him; but then his side tried to prove he wasn't at this place at this time. A case of alibi, you see."

* * * *

A loud gabble of voices heard from the court, suddenly hushed by the sharp clear voice of the usher. Then the door had closed again. Two more barristers had come out and lingered to talk a moment.

"This won't take more than an hour at most. There is just time to go and get some lunch."

"I'm quite willing. There's nothing interesting in this thing. I read the evidence over."

"Nothing fresh going to be brought forward, I suppose?"

"Not that I've heard of. Sure to be acquitted."

They went their way still chatting. Two other legal gentlemen came hurrying up, and one, red-faced, and good-humoured, was laughing at a joke the other was telling him. Some one standing by Jarman's side whispered—

"That's Goliah."

"Which?" asked Jarman eagerly.

The person he addressed did not catch the question. He had to repeat it, and by that time the barrister had disappeared. As Jarman pushed forward the person in charge of the door refused him admittance.

Meanwhile the story was going on :—"It was this way, you see—Was the woman to be believed or was she not? She swore most positively the man never did call at the hour he stated; but then could she positively swear to a circumstance so many months afterwards? The other woman, again, the one who lived next door, swore just as solemnly the other way, and how could she be sure? Now both the women swore that for some reason or other they happened to be watching the clock that particular hour that particular day. It was very strange—but one meets with strange things of the sort often enough."

* * * *

The door of the court opened for a moment, and a deep impressive voice was heard speaking alone. This was the attorney-general opening the case.

"The prisoner at the bar was in the habit of giving the deceased all his medicines. Some of the same poison from which he met his death was known to be kept in the medicine-chest in the room, and was found in that chest standing open on a side-table——"

A fussy little man carrying a piece of paper in his hand pushed his way through the crowd to the door just as it closed behind another man coming out. The man coming out called to the other by name—

"Addleton."

"Ah! You are the very party I wanted. I've got an order to pass me in here. I'm afraid I'm late. That woman's trial is on to-day, is it not? The woman who killed poor Draper."

"They're trying her now to find out whether she did or not. I think not, myself."

"Oh, she did, you may depend on it. Poor Draper! By-the-way, who is the attorney for the prosecution? I've something I can tell him. You must know this woman was a near relation of that preaching man, Bradshaw."

"You don't mean that?"

"I do though. Now the fellow's got a spite against me. I can't tell you why just at this moment. It's such a precious long story; but I am determined the fact of the relationship shall be made public."

The man with the interminable tale was still hard at it.

"Now, you see the clocks all agreed, and that, Serjeant David maintained, was the weak point in the case for the prosecution. He argued it was so unlikely that four clocks, and all of them cuckoos, could tally to the moment, and it was a question of moments, you see. Oh, he's a downy card, is David. There's no one like him. If he'd been on the other side the fellow would have been hung to a certainty."

* * * * *

A man close by who had caught the last words of the last speaker asked a bystander, "Is it not David speaking now?"

"Yes, that's him sure enough."

"How will this case go?"

"Guilty of course. I saw by the judge's face he'd made his mind up before he heard a word. They don't often hang women now though, do they?"

"Oh, don't they though."

The opening speech was over. The confused gabble arose again. Then the usher's clear voice was heard shouting silence, and then a name was called out.

"Thomas Yolland."

Some more people came out, talking as they came.

"Did you get a sight of her where you stood? Not good-looking is she?"

"No, not at all good-looking. Very white and sickly; seems to be in bad health."

"Poor creature. Don't believe she did it."

"Nonsense. Not a doubt of it."

Others came out in a few minutes.

"The case is as good as broken down already."

"I don't know that I should say so though if an enlightened British jury was not trying it. If there's a chance of them making fools of themselves, depend upon it they won't let the opportunity slip."

The tale was still in progress :-- "The question was, could he or could he not have done the distance in three minutes and a half? If these clocks were right, he had seven minutes to do it in. (Don't you see the point?) But if, as David argued, some of them were wrong, or all of them were wrong, and the only reliable clock was that at the railway station, why then he had only three minutes and a half."

* * * * *

Yolland had given his evidence. Mrs. Draper was called, and then Doctor Francis. Mr. Drake came out of the court for a moment to speak to his client. Jarman fairly gasped for breath when he saw him, and caught at his hand as a drowning man might catch at a floating fragment of wreck.

"Well, well, what do you think?"

"There must be an acquittal. Pray be calm and leave it to me. All that can be done is being done, rest assured of that."

"Yes, yes, of course ; I know after your promise you will do all you can. There, there, excuse me. God knows I try to be patient."

Mr. Drake turned to go again. The other stopped him.

"Are our witnesses here? Will you want me?"

"No, no. Our counsel is not in favour of calling any. He will let the case stand on its own merits, and knock all the other side's evidence to pieces. Make your mind quite easy, we are certain to win the day."

He was gone again. The case for the prosecution was over. The counsel for the defence had risen. Jarman, leaning against the wall, closed his eyes, and seemed to be unconscious of all that was passing around him. Addleton came out of the court, looked towards him, started, and stood still. Jarman opened his eyes at the moment and called him by name.

"Good Heavens, are you ill?" the other asked. "How you are altered. This sad case, I suppose. Well, well, we must hope for the best."

"How do they seem to think it will go?"

"I do not know. But you must not despair yet—I am so sorry—I must be getting on."

He got away as quickly as possible. The door swung to and the counsel's voice became inaudible. Close to Jarman's ear the interminable tale was going on the same as ever. Had it always been going on? Had it ceased for a time, and had the speaker gone away and returned again? Had the trial been one or several hours in progress? These were questions he asked himself, but for which he could find no answer. In a dreamy way he listened to the story.

"The way it was done was this. He must have got in at the window, taken the old woman unawares, killed her by a blow on the back of the head, and let himself out again by the door, which had been locked on the inside. Now, if the clocks were right, you see, he did all this in less than five minutes."

* * * * *

The speech proceeded, reached its termination, and at some applause Jarman started forward.

"What was that?" he asked eagerly. "Is it the verdict?"

But the person coming out whom he had addressed undeceived him.

"Not quite, but nearly as good. The whole case has broken down. Upon such evidence it will be perfectly impossible to convict."

"Thank God!" muttered Jarman, and once more leant back against the wall and closed his eyes. Mr. Drake touched him on the arm.

"The judge is summing up. We are all right now."

He turned back again after hastily whispering these words.

Some more people came out of the court; others went in. The interminable tale was still in progress, but this time the words fell without meaning upon Jarman's ears. The judge was speaking now he heard some one say. People pushed backwards and forwards past him in and out the door. He fixed his eyes wildly upon their faces, and now and then his lips moved as though asking a question.

The judge's even tones still struck his ear whenever the court door opened. At last they stopped. A bustle and loud murmurs within betokened the end of his address. Some broken sentences from those crowding out showed what had taken place.

"Dead against her."

"Never knew anything like it."

"Left them nothing for it but a verdict of guilty."

"Dead against her."

"Dead against the prisoner!"

Trembling in every limb, with wildly-dilated eyes, with lips which, though parted as in speech, yet gave out no sound, Jarman waited and listened. Drake did not come, but some one brought him a line scribbled inside an envelope. He tried to read, but the letters danced confusedly before his eyes, and the paper fell to the ground.

Now again there was silence within the court. The jury had returned. A moment's pause—

GUILTY!

The people were forcing their way out. Jarman rushed forward, wildly waving his arms.

"She's innocent!" he gasped out almost inaudibly. "I will speak!"

Drake coming forward caught him round the waist. Others closed round. His teeth were set, his eyes blood-

shot, his hands clenched ; the blood trickled down from the corners of his mouth.

"The man's in a fit," some one said ; "carry him out into the open air."

They carried him out, therefore, struggling and gasping. A few moments afterwards he lay quiet enough,—he had fainted.

The passers-by wondered what ailed the gentleman. He was carried into an adjoining chemist's shop, and a small crowd following hung about the door, and peeped in at the window between the coloured bottles. But very few noticed this little incident, and then other people in the street hustled along, fully occupied with their own affairs, many not even glancing towards the gloomy gaol, where at that moment the sentence of death was being passed—

"To be taken back to the place from whence you came, and thence to a place of execution, there to be hanged by the neck until you shall be dead, and may the Lord have mercy upon your soul!"





VIII.

INSIDE NEWGATE.

CHAPTER I.

FHE trial was over now. All that could be done had been done. All the predictions that had been made had been falsified by what had taken place. It was but small consolation to those most deeply interested to know that, in spite of all law and justice, the verdict had been given against the prisoner, and the sentence passed. Ann was to die.

There had been no recommendation to mercy. Next day the papers were so full of the visit of that foreign prince to the City, of which mention has already been made, that the report of the trial was necessarily curtailed. The world at large had other matters to occupy it besides the fate of one wretched woman lying prisoner in Newgate, who was to be hanged by-and-by—three Mondays hence.

It seemed more than probable that the execution would take place, and the body be interred within the prison walls, before the public began to wake up to the fact that this little tragedy had been played out without an audience, in a quiet corner, and no one the wiser. How was it that this trial excited so little interest? Who can tell?

By some fatality this murder had not been a “popular” one, and now it was only by accident that public attention was directed to it. Poor ill-advised William Bradshaw wrote a leading article in the *Thirsty Soul* against a recently published novel by Little Addleton. This was not the first

time Mr. Bradshaw's organ had attacked this popular writer. He vowed vengeance, and at once set about its accomplishment.

Two days after the trial a paragraph appeared in the town letter of a country paper stating the relationship existing between Mr. Bradshaw and the condemned prisoner in Newgate. Within a week the paragraph had been copied into almost every London paper. A vague statement partly contradicting the story appeared in the *Thirsty Soul* on Saturday, which confirmed the truth in the minds of those who doubted, and made many thousands acquainted with the fact who otherwise would never have heard of it.

A furiously satirical reply appeared within a day or two in one of the comic journals. Another paper in want of a subject took up the case. Another reviewed the whole story of the murder, and indignantly called attention to the unfair summing up of the judge. A rush of letters from correspondents immediately followed, and before the week was out the whole town was discussing the crime and trial of Ann Draper.

Nothing could have happened more unfortunately as far as William Bradshaw's worldly prospects were concerned. The new chapel long talked of had not yet been built, owing to some disagreement among the gentlemen to whom the management of the business had been intrusted. Whilst the dispute was at its highest the bank broke where the money already subscribed had been deposited. The new chapel then never would be built unless fresh subscriptions were raised ; and this seemed doubtful, for somehow William Bradshaw's popularity was just a little on the wane.

Just at this moment a new preacher was founding a new sect, right under the noses of the Chosen Few in the same parish. His style was directly opposite to that of William. His was not the familiar and free-and-easy, but the deeply sonorous and denunciatory. He thundered forth terrors of bottomless pits and raging furnaces. Every Sunday his chapel was filled with frightened women, who screamed and fainted and were carried out, only to return in a week to scream and faint again. His popularity was enormous ; and William's benches were not nearly as full as they were wont to be. This was all the greater misfortune for William, because unhappily the bulk of his wife's fortune had been lost in the same bank that had swallowed up the subscriptions.

The remainder was invested in the *Thirsty Soul*, the circulation of which was not as good as it had been some time ago.

One day William Bradshaw came home white with rage, brandishing a newspaper in his hand.

His wife began to grumble at the time he had kept the dinner waiting.

"Hold your tongue, woman," he said (they had quarrelled a good deal lately). "Do you think I have any appetite for dinner after this? Look there! Read that! They are bent upon our ruin!"

He pointed as he spoke to an article in a serious journal, expressing its astonishment that the near relation of a condemned murderer could be allowed to preach the gospel even to such a congregation as gathered together in his obscure chapel. Before the woman was hanged he would surely, the journal said, if he had any decency left, withdraw himself from the public gaze.

"Before she is hanged," cried William bitterly. "To think that I should have lived to suffer such humiliation! Retire, indeed! That is true enough. But what dark corner shall we find wherein to hide our disgrace?"

The next morning, after a sleepless night, William Bradshaw arose pale and haggard, but calmer than he had been for some days. He had come to a determination, and set off at an early hour for the City. Here he found out the counsel who had conducted the defence, and, after a brief interview, was referred by him to Mr. Drake's office. He had come, he told the latter gentleman, to see whether any steps could be taken in "this distressing business," and if so, to say that he was willing to pay expenses.

Mr. Drake informed him that steps were being taken, as it was, and the case was being conducted with great energy. A representation had been forwarded to the Secretary of State. A flaw had been discovered in the legal details. A review of the case was hoped for, which must undoubtedly result in establishing Ann's innocence. As for the money, said Mr. Drake, somewhat contemptuously eyeing a crumpled five-pound note the minister had produced from his purse, Mr. Jarman had already deposited a hundred pounds towards the current expenses.

Mr. Bradshaw put away his money in confusion, but

felt relieved in his mind. "Where was Mr. Jarman?" he asked.

"Strange to say, I cannot tell you," replied the lawyer. "For two days he has disappeared. He certainly ought to be here. It is, indeed, very inconvenient and unfortunate. I want his directions before I can act."

These words were to a certain extent prophetic of the disasters to come. The week passed slowly away and yet Jarman did not make his appearance. The money was already exhausted and large sums would still be required, Mr. Drake said, and he wrote to William asking whether he was now inclined to advance funds, but his affairs were already in a crippled state. He must raise the money himself before he could advance it, even if he made up his mind to do so.

"Money," screamed Mrs. Bradshaw. "What for? Indeed you shall not. Not a penny of mine shall go to such a cause."

"Silence," he shouted in return. "Do you know that her death will be our disgrace."

"Is there no other way?"

"Only one."

She pressed him to tell her what this one was; but he blushed deeply and was silent. Later on he yielded to her solicitation.

"I am told that Ann's health has suffered greatly since she has been in prison. If the enquiry be prosecuted at some length, she may probably die a natural death before the day arrives."





CHAPTER II.

DHE murder at the little watering-place was by this time really the town's talk. The newspapers one after another took up the story and rang the changes upon it. Some professed unbounded belief in Ann's innocence, and one, though allowing the probability of her guilt, boldly espoused her cause and protested that the dastard who had met his death from her hand only too richly deserved his fate.

And yet the few days Ann had still to live passed quickly by, and in spite of all the talk nothing seemed to be done. The document spoken of as being forwarded to the secretary of state had not three days before the fatal Monday left Mr. Drake's office. Jarman had not yet returned. Money was wanted, and the whole business was being muddled for want of it.

Saturday came at last. William had raised a sum sufficient for the present to appease the legal wolves. The memorial was on its way to the secretary's country seat, under charge of a special messenger. The day passed and no reply was returned. On Sunday morning the congregation at William's chapel waited in vain for their minister. He had gone to Newgate to bid the prisoner farewell.

As he passed through the street he saw many people loitering about and peering up at the prison walls. Were they already gathering together to take their places for the show? The execution was of course, as this occurred some years ago, to be a public one. The fact that it was a woman who was to die increased the number of the sight-

seers. Although there was a rumour of a probable reprieve, before dusk a large crowd had assembled, and the taverns round about were densely crowded.

It was said that the windows had let well. A young nobleman had taken one. Surely, not a young nobleman—a counter-skipper—a shop boy, perhaps. Not so. A real nobleman had paid for his window just as my lord Tom Noddy did, about whom Ingoldsby sang in past times, and early in the evening his lordship came there with his friends—Lieutenant Tregooze was he one of them? and Sir Carnaby and the rest? Yes; they were all there, or their prototypes, you may be sure.

And why not? A party of literary gentlemen had taken another window. Little Addleton, Yolland, several others besides, who had come there in pursuit of character—for a literary purpose—to see what an execution was really like, and write a description of it.

The common herd meanwhile took their places at the barriers, and held out resolutely against the heavy down-falling rain. There was no other way of securing a good point of view, for every hour a fresh influx of sight-seers arrived. To pass the time songs were sung—the loud choruses of which penetrated the prison walls and reached the ears of the woman for whose death agonies the mob was waiting.

More on account of his being a minister of the gospel than because he was Ann's relative, William Bradshaw obtained an interview with Ann. He found her pale and wasted, as he had expected. She rose when he entered, and said calmly,

“Well, William, what made you come?”

“Was it so unnatural?” he asked almost savagely; and they were for some time silent.

Throughout the interview they were not left alone; but the warder present retired to the other side of the room, whilst they conversed in a low voice.

“You know, perhaps, that great efforts have been made to save you,” he said.

“I have heard something of it. Without avail?”

“Yes; I am sorry to say we have done no good.”

“I thought you would not,” she said; “I felt that I was to die.”

"Heaven have mercy upon you, Ann," said William; and they were silent again.

"You think me guilty, like the rest?" she said, presently, but without any emotion in her voice.

"What can I think? After the trial—after the evidence that was produced. But you are so near the end now. You would not go out of the world in silence. Confess if you are guilty."

She smiled as she replied,

"It would avail me little whatever I may say now. It has all been settled. They have made up their minds to kill me."

"Have you thought of the horror and degradation of such a death?" he asked in a low, eager tone. "At least, you might escape that."

"Escape?"

"By dying another way!"

"I do not understand!"

"You don't think he is listening, do you?"

"No."

"I could give you the means of instantaneous death—to be used only at the last hour—when you are certain there is no hope left. Have you the courage?"

"What is it?—Is it——"

"Yes. For your life do not speak the word out loud. I have it here in my hand. When I say good-bye, and shake you by the hand, I will leave it there."

When they had been silent for a few more minutes, she said,

"Why do you do this? It is from no love for me."

"You must not say that, Ann," the other replied hastily, but trembling as he spoke, and keeping his eyes fixed steadfastly upon the ground. "You cannot think that I can quite forget the past. You do not know what I have suffered—on your account. How else can I help you at this dreadful crisis? They have tried you, and found you guilty of the crime. None on earth can say whether justly or unjustly. There is, it seems to me, no hope of life; but you may yet defeat those who would couple your memory with the ignominy of a scaffold."

"My memory is of most value to those who are left behind," she said, bitterly.

"You cannot doubt my motive, Ann. You must know what a risk I run in doing this. If it were known I should be disgraced—ruined."

"Yes, yes, I know that. Thank you for helping me. I am indeed grateful for the greatest boon that I can hope for; after life is death."

A few minutes after he had taken his leave. She watched him until the door closed with a heavy clang; then listened to his footsteps until the sound died away in the distance.

"What an end to it all!" she thought, as she covered her face with her hands. "What a gloomy farce it has been! What a waste of time! What folly! But at least I can cheat them at last!"

In the bosom of her dress she had concealed a tiny phial he had given her—such a tiny phial, but filled with what deadly stuff!





CHAPTER III.

ONE day James Jarman found lying at his hotel a letter, written by an old friend. He did not recognise the writing, for it was many long years since he last saw it. Neither was the signature very legible, and for some time he was unable to spell out the name of Richard Starkey. During the earlier stages of Ann's examination, before she was committed for trial, he had several times heard what the landlord was called, but never once connected the man with the felonious clerk at Harkershanks's warehouse, down the crooked City lane. As he read this letter, however, the whole truth flashed upon him, and he came once more, though only in imagination as yet, face to face with his old enemy.

The writer said that he would have written sooner, to ask for an interview, but had been languishing for more than a month past in the county gaol, where he had been incarcerated for debt. Now that he had regained his liberty he was in such a destitute condition, he could not scrape together the money to pay his fare to town. No time was to be lost; and he therefore begged that James would, if possible, at once come down, and see him at the address he gave—a village on the outskirts of the little bathing-place where the murder had taken place.

The reason why this interview was requested, was that Richard Starkey had valuable information to impart, which might be worth a price. He was a poor man, he said, but he hoped an honest one, and would not be found unreasonable. Without pausing for a moment to ask himself what

the information might be, James prepared to obey the other's bidding. He called for a railway guide, ascertained the time a train would start, put his cheque-book, some gold and notes, and a pistol into his pocket, and sent for a cab.

The village whence Starkey had dated his letter, lay about half a mile or so from the town by the side of the sea. There was one way to it over the cliffs, but at low tide it could be approached much more quickly by the sands, only this way was dangerous unless you were quite sure when the sea would return again. James Jarman, however, chose the latter, for the tide had just turned, and was going rapidly out. In a short time, walking at a brisk pace, he had reached his journey's end.

He knocked at the door of a wretchedly-poor-looking cottage, scarcely better than a mud hovel, which from the directions he had received, he presumed was the place where Starkey was to be found. A woman, who answered the door, eyed him for some moments suspiciously, before making any reply. Then she informed him that Starkey had gone out for a walk.

"Are you the person he expected?"

"Yes."

"He has gone towards the town then, to meet you."

If this were the case he had probably gone by the path over the cliffs. Jarman suggested this hypothesis.

"Yes, it was high tide when he left. It's very dangerous to go by the lower road when the tide comes in; it comes so fast. There was a man drowned there only this last week—but they will go that way. It's a good deal nearer, you see."

James Jarman left word that he would come back in about an hour's time, if he should miss the person he wanted to see, but that he intended to walk along the top of the cliff, and keep a sharp lookout. When he had gone a few yards from the door, the woman called to him.

"If you're a stranger in these parts, I might as well tell you to be careful not to go too near the edge of the cliff; it has given way in two or three places, this rough weather. The whole lot will come down together some of these days."

"Thank you," he replied, "I will take care."

As he walked away he looked at his watch—in less than two hours' time night would fall. "I hope I shall meet the

fellow," he thought, "or it may be too dark to travel by either road in safety."

It was not a pleasant day for a walk ; the north-east wind drove the rain against his back. In front of him the town lay half-hidden in a mist. The naked fields stretched away on the right ; on the left lay the sea. There was but one solitary sail to be seen : it was too rough for the fishermen to venture out, and such strange boats as had taken refuge in the bay, were hidden from view by a projecting portion of the cliff. As he walked along, he noticed several places where the earth had given way, and fallen over on the beach below. In others, alarming crevices yawned across his path. The roadway had fallen altogether at one point, dragging with it some iron railings that had stood between it and the edge of the precipice, and which now, twisted out of shape, hung over the side, waiting for a violent gust of wind to blow them down into the sea.

James Jarman shaded his eyes, and peered long and anxiously across the country towards the town.

"How provoking that I should have missed him," he said ; "what rascality has the fellow to propose ? I must see him, I suppose, and yet I have not an hour to waste."

He wandered on until he reached the top of the steps leading down on to the beach, and passed by those railings upon which Mr. Starkey in times past had smoked so many meditative pipes, to gaze up at the house where Ann had lived and Draper had died. Its aspect was at this moment more desolate than ever ; the rough weather of the last few days had seriously damaged the stucco of the lower story. One of the chimney-pots had been blown over, and had fallen through the roof. The place had certainly the appearance of being under some sort of ban. No wonder the children of the neighbourhood fought shy of it at night-fall, with the belief that it was haunted. The boldest hearted and most audacious urchin of the neighbourhood had been known in the broad daylight to knock a loud double knock at the door, and call out, "Come on, Ghosty !" but a faint rustle within, responsive as it seemed to his voice, had sent him flying in wild terror from the spot.

James Jarman gazed for some time upon the exterior of the dreary building before he turned his face again to the east. It was plain to see from his dark brow that his protracted meditations had summoned up no pleasant memories.

He strode along at a rapid pace now, and reached the little village in less than half the time it had previously taken him to make the journey, but he had, however, been a long while absent, and the twilight was fast changing into darkness.

Almost at the moment, however, that he was about to knock at the cottage door, a voice called to him by name from a stile close at hand. He paused and waited, and a figure came forward through the twilight. It was Starkey.

"Oh," said Jarman, "you have come at last. I was afraid I could not wait."

"You did well to wait. What I have to say to you is very particular."

"You are Richard Starkey, are you not?"

"To be sure, Sir. It is so long ago since we were clerks together. You forget me; I am much changed."

"You appear to be changed," Jarman replied, carelessly.
"Well?"

"I suffered a great deal after I left the house there down the City lane. That cold-blooded old scoundrel is dead since then. You know that, I suppose?"

"I know that Mr. Hankershanks is dead."

"Well, Mr. Hankershanks, if you like it better. You had more cause than I had to cherish his memory. He never did me a good turn that I know of. He thrust me out into the street like a dog to starve. I never forgot an injury, I don't. I've sworn a thousand times I would be even with all concerned in that business."

Jarman looked at his watch.

"I have exactly three quarters of an hour to catch my train. I can give you fifteen minutes. Is that time enough for you to say what you have got to say?"

"Three minutes will do; but I cannot say it here."

"Where then?"

"Somewhere where we can be by ourselves. I'm sorry you're in such a hurry, though I shall have to see you again, I am afraid."

"It is your fault that the time has been lost. I have been waiting for you two hours at least."

"I did not expect you down so soon, and I did not want to be seen by any of the townspeople. Since my smash up, they've been very nasty tempered, some of them. I went round through the fields to the railway. That's how we missed one another."

"Do not let us waste any more time now. Which way shall we walk? You can say what you have to say as we go along."

"You'll hardly catch the train by the upper road. We shall see fewer people on the sands. Shall we go that way?"

"If it is safe."

"Safe? How do you mean?"

Starkey looked up into his face with an ugly leer, as he said this:

"What are you afraid of?"

"Of the tide, that's all," replied Jarman, returning his look with a hard stare.





CHAPTER IV

€ 6 **H**,” said Starkey, “that’s all, is it? There’s no fear of that,” he continued, after peering for a few moments silently out towards the sea.
“We sha’n’t take long getting to the steps.”
“Let us set off then at once.”

Without wasting any more time in conversation, they started upon their walk, and continued on their way for some time in silence. The scene was at that moment gloomy enough to have frightened a timid wayfarer who might have been passing that way without a guide. The sun had some time ago sunk below the horizon. The low wailing sound of distant wind crept over the water, betokening a coming storm. Some sea birds overhead wheeled round in circles, waking the echoes with their shrill cries.

When they had pursued their journey for some ten minutes or so, Starkey, who up to this seemed to have been waiting for the other to speak, impatiently broke the long silence.

“Unless we say what we have got to say at once, the time will come for us to separate before anything has been decided on.”

Jarman came to a standstill.

“It was you who wrote to me, not I to you. It was you who said that you had information to impart.”

“Yes, I did. About this murder.”

Without one muscle of his face moving, Jarman waited with his eyes fixed steadily upon the other.

“Well?”

“You know what I have got to say, James Jarman, though

you may be in ignorance of the means by which I got at the truth. You know though that I know the truth, even by what I have said ; before, indeed, I have said anything."

"Perhaps so. Well?"

"I told you awhile ago I never forget or forgive those who have injured me. Don't run away with the idea from those words that I want a terrible revenge, like a person in a play or a tale-book. I want revenge, of course, but my notion of revenge is money. Pay me well, and it will be well worth your while to shut my mouth. Do you hear?"

"I hear ; but suppose you give me a notion of what you are to shut your mouth on. I am quite in the dark so far."

"Not at all in the dark, begging your pardon, James Jarman ; but you wish to be on the safe side, I see, and hear what is to be heard before committing yourself."

"That is quite right. I wish to hear if there be anything worth hearing. Only come to the point ; we have no time to spare."

"I need not waste the time, then, by telling you what you know. We commence by taking it for granted that the person lying in Newgate, accused of Draper's murder, is innocent."

"Of course she is. Well!"

"Of course she is! You own that, then? And pray who is guilty?"

"I accuse no one. Who says it was a murder at all?"

"I do!" cried Starkey with sudden passion, and shaking as he spoke a trembling finger in the other's face—"I do ; and that you are the murderer!"

There was a momentary silence ; and while Jarman, deadly white, stood gazing upon his accuser, his hand crept upwards towards his breast pocket, where the pistol was. Starkey, without noticing this movement, continued his accusation with breathless eagerness.

"I know you did it, because I have the proof. Because I have a scrap of paper that was picked up by the dead man's bedside. There are only a few words, but they are enough to hang you if they saw the light."

"And what do you propose?"

"To sell them to you."

"For how much?"

"Five thousand pounds. It's dirt cheap to a man with your money. Too cheap."

"They are a forgery, perhaps."

"You know they are no forgery, even before you see them. They were written by Draper a few minutes after they had left and a few moments before he died. They say simply that you have been in there to see him, that you gave him his medicine, and that you poured in it the poison from the medicine chest."

"Show me the paper."

"I have not got it here. Bring me the money to-morrow, and you shall have it. When the paper is once destroyed you will be safe enough, for without proof who would believe so wild a tale? When the girl is dead too——"

The other turned upon him with an oath, which was uttered almost like the snarl of a savage beast.

"You unutterable scoundrel! do you think I am going to let her die as you propose doing? There are ten days left. I am going to wait twelve hours longer for the secretary's reply. To-night I start for the country to see him. If the answer is unfavourable, I give myself into custody; and to guard against the frustration of my purpose by sudden death, I have written a full confession of the deed, and carry it at this moment in a pocket-book at my breast."

Starkey was silent for a moment, and seemed to weigh the other's reply.

"Why have you delayed so long? Because you thought she was certain to be acquitted?"

"Yes; because I was assured by the best legal authorities at every step of the unhappy affair, that at the next her release was certain. Because I loved her, and love is selfish. Because I knew at any moment I could save her, and thus allowed her to suffer the suspense yet a little and a little longer in the hope that all would go well, and we might be happy together. Can you understand now?"

"I think so; and I can also understand that as her life is as dear to you as your own, or more, it will be as much worth your while as ever to buy my secret. I will sell it you for double the amount I first mentioned."

During the last few sentences, wholly carried away by the interest of the subject in hand, they had remained quite motionless. Jarman was the first to make any movement.

"You must come up to town to-morrow, and we will decide what the price is to be when I have the secretary's reply. You are without a pound, you say?"

"Yes."

"I will give you some money before I leave ; but we must get on now. Is not that the water coming in. I cannot see. Good God ! what was that ?"

Starkey shaded his eyes, and strove to pierce the darkness. Then pulled his companion by the arm, and in a frightened voice, said,

"By Heaven ! it is the tide coming in, and some of the cliff in front has fallen down. I hope no more will fall."

"We had better go back."

"No, no ; the water's in behind us now. This is a sort of bay we are in. We must run for it. We shall have to wade up to our knees, I expect, to reach the steps."

"You should have known that there was not time to come by the shore. Your stupidity may cost us our lives."

As Jarman spoke he gazed wistfully up at the beetling cliffs overhead. Escape was impracticable in that direction. A little further on the base of the cliff could only be seen at intervals, between the advancing and retiring waves. The sea was making fast, and not a moment was to be lost.

They were yet four or five hundred yards distant from the steps by which they hoped to ascend to the road above. Every step, however, that they took brought them further out, and the water already reached their knees.

Breathless and drenched to the skin, they with a desperate effort passed the point, but the worst had yet to come. The cliffs jutted out again before them, and large masses of rock scattered about made it almost impossible to keep a firm footing against the violence of the waves. As they turned the next corner a large wave came making towards them, gathering force as it approached and swelling its gigantic mass so as to shut out the view of all beyond.

As it came, Jarman fixed himself as firmly as he could to resist the shock, and bowed his head before the wall of water towering over him.

Next moment, however, with a roll like thunder, it had broken above him and he was swept off his feet, and hurled headlong beneath the swollen volume of water that closed over head. Stunned, but not senseless yet, he struggled to his feet again, and looked around for his companion. At a dozen yards distant, he heard a faint cry from the sea, which bore the drowning wretch away.

Setting his teeth, and bracing up what strength remained

to him, Jarman made another desperate effort to reach the point of safety. Another wave came rolling in, and broke above his head. Again he was dashed head first among the broken rocks. Again, bleeding from his wounds, blinded by the foam, he struggled on. The voice of his old enemy was long since choked by the water in his throat, but the wailing wind seemed to imitate the death-cry he had heard. Perhaps he fancied, too, that his own death-knell was ringing in his ears.

Overhead somewhere a church bell was tolling, and the wind carried the sound towards him. For a moment once, out at sea he saw a light flash out across the water, and thought he heard a signal of distress. Now he had reached the foot of the steps, or the place where the steps had been; but there he saw that his case was hopeless. The noise he had heard a while ago was that of the falling cliff at this point. He was, as it were in a corner, out of reach of all hope, and seemed to understand that the supreme moment was at hand. Then he turned his back to the town, and faced his death.

Was there borne upon the wind to the world he left behind—to her whom he had so dearly and so deeply loved—to her for whose sake he had imperilled his soul—a stray word of the dying prayer he breathed for her happiness and safety?

A mighty wave came thundering in, and struck him senseless at a blow, then carried him dead out to sea.





CHAPTER V.

 HIS all happened ten days before the Monday when Ann was to be hanged. The hours of that last day passed with painful tediousness, although the poor girl trembled at each stroke of the clock.

She sat silent and motionless, her hands clasped, her chin resting on her breast. A terrible calmness had come over her, for she was weary of struggling against her fate. They had condemned her to death—they were going to kill her for a crime she was innocent of—but there was no help.

No ; nothing on earth could save her. If the secretary of state had sent a favourable reply, before this she would have heard the particulars. They would not keep her in ignorance many moments, the chaplain had told her, but she must not hope. No ; she must make up her mind that her life was over—that to-morrow she must die.

Finally, she had made up her mind to this, and in a stony silence was waiting for the gathering of the darkness of her last night on earth. At length the night came on, and then the faint murmur of the brutal rabble without swelled into a roar. The harsh sound of a song, discordantly chanted within only a few yards of her, from a hundred throats, penetrated to her cell. The warder looked towards her with a shrinking dread in his eyes, wondering whether she heard.

She looked up and listened.

“It is like the theatre,” she said. “They are waiting for the play to begin. I hardly tremble as much as I did that night I acted at the country playhouse.”

But as the sound of the song grew louder, she sank down shuddering, and hid her face.

Heaven help the wretched prisoner in such a case! We are accustomed to find authors who would mete out a terrible fate for the villain in their books—select many forms of death more or less horrible; but what terrors can really surpass those of the condemned cell—of the helpless wretch, shivering within earshot of the mob, athirst for his blood, knowing that there is no possible chance of escape—that he is weak and helpless as a babe, and that a few hours hence at most they will come and bind him hand and foot and carry him out, if he be too weak with terror to walk, and strangle him, while the crowd hoot and hiss!

This fearful day at length came to an end. The night set in as has been said, and the mob gathered denser and denser without the prison walls. But about eleven o'clock the door of the cell opened, and the governor, bearing a paper in his hand, appeared upon the threshold. She rose all in a tremble, and gasping for breath. Had it been a disappointment, she felt that the shock must have struck her dead. But she read in that kind face before her as in a book that hope was not dead.

In that waterproof pocket-book which James Jarman had bought at the little sea-side town he had placed the confession he had written. When his body was picked up some few days after his death by a French fishing-boat the documents were forwarded as soon as possible by the consul at Calais to the secretary of state in England. Almost at the same time the important scrap of paper which Starkey had wanted to sell was found among the papers he had left at the cottage; and his dead body soon after being also found, this other proof was taken to the nearest magistrate by the woman under whose roof he had been living for some few days before the accident.

There were other papers besides the confession found in Jarman's pocket-book—a letter of instructions to his solicitor, and a letter to Ann. The latter ran thus:—

“When you read this, my own darling, if ever you do read it, you will have learnt to hate me—to execrate my memory. How can I hope to prove to you that I did all I have done for your sake? I cannot even persuade myself that such

was the case. When I did it I was in ignorance of your marriage, and I hoped that if you left him you would come to me. It is only such misery as I have suffered that can be looked for when we tamper with Heaven's will and seek to make our hands the instruments of God's wrath. If you live long enough to forget all this and to be happy, dearest, as I pray that Heaven in its mercy will permit you, you will be rich with the money I have left for you. Do not reject it, because he who gave it you was he who killed your love. I always meant it should be yours. It was my dream when miles and miles away. It was my dream too, then, that I might share it with you. But that was not to be. Perhaps I shall be dead before you read this. I have made up my mind to kill myself when I am sure of your safety. God bless you, my darling. You know not how bitterly I repent the sufferings I have caused you ; but you know not how I hated him when I did it, and when his baseness and treachery were fresh in my mind. Forgive me and forget me. It is too late now to undo the past. But oh, if I could unlive my life ! If I could live but one moment in your love before what is to come !”

The story of James Jarman's love ends here with Ann's release from prison.





POSTSCRIPT.

IN A BOX AT THE STRAND.

T was that period of the year when so many people are so very miserable, and which — for some reason or other hitherto unexplained—it is the custom to call Merry Christmas.

It was one of the “good old-fashioned” Christmases, bitterly cold and bleak. The old-fashioned snow, which is so trying to the worn-out boots of some poor people, lay deep upon the ground. The ice was thick, and there was rare skating in the parks. Some thousands who did not skate, however, were rather uncomfortable in their cellars and attics without any fire. Some even perished from cold in the streets. It was merry Christmas time.

Yes, it was merry Christmas time. The merry tradesmen were balancing their books. Presently their merry little bills would be sent in to us. The merry butcher had gaily decked with mistletoe a coarse kind of meat, specially purchased for this festive season, and called Christmas beef. The merry publican had, with a free and liberal hand, mixed his Christmas gin. The merry grocer, the merry greengrocer—all of the merry band, had got their little Christmas swindles ready, and they were all joyously decorated with sprigs of holly. As yet the merry chemist showed no sign; his time would come anon.

First in the field, however, was the merry publisher, who, of all his brothers, made the most noise about the coming time of jollity and good-fellowship. This year he was going in more heavily than usual for his Christmas numbers. He

was going to have lots of pictures and lots of comic stories. All the droll dogs upon town were to kick up their literary heels in his journals and magazines. He did not care how funny they were at this jovial time, and he patted them on the back in his most fatherly style, and bade them, if possible, surpass themselves ; only he beat them down to the last shilling in their prices, for all that.

Those open-hearted fellows, too—the theatrical managers—were all hard at work getting up their Christmas entertainments with no other object in life—if you will only believe me—than giving us a right down good Christmas treat, which we might all of us come and see, if we paid for it.

It was, as I have said, merry Christmas time, and a couple of score and more servants, messengers, shopboys, printers' devils, cabmen, 'busmen, and small relations had wished me the compliments of the season at an average of two shillings and sixpence per head all round. It was boxing-night, and there was a new burlesque being performed for the first time at the Strand Theatre, and a friend and myself had a private box.

It cannot exactly be said that all the world was that night at the Strand, because the little theatre will hold, when at its fullest, but few people, and probably there was not a seat to spare just then in any house in London, but there were many notabilities present. There were gentlemen of the press in the stalls, lofty-browed, calm and composed, cold and critical. There was also rank and fashion. The tawny moustache—the white moustache—the moustache of promise, as yet only a hair or two. And there was beauty, or what passes for it. There was golden beauty—very golden, with if anything an orange tint, except at the roots. There was dark beauty, scornfully critical of golden beauty, knowing how that sort of thing is done, you know—and just a little envious of the effect. There were several celebrated people—Jason Burgoyne, Little Addleton, two actresses without engagements, a literary lord, a lord famous for being a lord or for something else I do not at the moment remember. A famous foreigner unknown over here, and pooh-poohed accordingly. Some of our princes of commerce—the writer of this narrative and his friend Mr. Sm*th of the St*ck E*ch*nge.

We had all come to see the new burlesque—a burlesque by one of the busy B's who have the burlesque monopoly at

our London theatres, and we had made up our minds to be delighted. Nor were we disappointed. How could we be? There were the gay airs from the music halls (drat those ungenteel places for getting hold of all the lively music). There were the bright dresses, the high-heeled satin boots, the pretty faces and shapely limbs. There were in one scene all together doing their best, David James, Thomas Thorne, and Elise Holt, a trio which, I suppose, was never equalled on this or any other stage since burlesque first came into fashion.

But before the burlesque began we had plenty to amuse ourselves with in looking at the rest of the company, and they too, perhaps, found some amusement in looking at us. My friend Sm*th, it is well known in literary and artistic circles, is a member of the Arundel, the Junior Garrick, and one or two other clubs of that character where he makes many friends, whom he afterwards invites down to his villa at Putney, at which I may say there are at certain seasons jinks of the highest character and without limit. This evening he was nodding to one and the other until the present writer began to feel almost savage that he knew no friends whom he in his turn could nod to, if only to show that he had a friend or two in the world as well as some other people. Sm*th even left the box to pay visits to his numerous acquaintance, and left the gentleman whom he had come with to amuse himself with the playbill.

He thus amused himself for sometime until presently Sm*th came rushing back in a state of great excitement.

"Didn't I once hear you say you were acquainted with Miss Whitaker—Ann Whitaker—Mrs. Draper that was—the actress, you know?"

"Yes, I do know her," I replied.

"Then there she is in the box opposite, all by herself, and I'm dying to make her acquaintance."

There, indeed, sat the Ann Whitaker of the foregoing narrative, alone, as my friend had said, looking much prettier, I thought, than I had ever seen her, and, as usual, exquisitely dressed. Many glasses were turned upon her, and a murmur of recognition and astonishment passed round the house—for it was well known that she was engaged for the burlesque opening to the pantomime at the Great Sahara.

None of us had seen her for some time. She had been

at Paris for six months, specially engaged as the *Meese Anglaise* in Offenbach's new opera of *Satan en Pantoufle*. She had grown somewhat plumper, I fancied, and her cheeks were rosier than of yore. These changes made me half inclined to think, for a moment, that I might have been mistaken, and that it really was not Mrs. Draper; but now she caught my eye, and the old sweet smile lit up her face, and she bowed as she used to do when the "gods" thundered out their applause upon her entrance.

As it was now, some of the "gods" here had recognised the favourite, and were pointing her out eagerly to one another. Some of them applauded; and one voice called out, "Bravo, Whitaker." This made her glance up and smile, but immediately afterwards blush, and draw back as much as possible behind the curtain of the box.

That fellow, Sm*th, would not be content unless he was taken round to this comedy queen, and introduced to her with all due forms and ceremonies. Burgoyne came up into the box also, and Little Addleton, and several others. It was fortunate she had the box all to herself, or there would not have been anything like room enough for all her admirers. As it was some were obliged to stand out in the lobby. Under this disadvantage, and from far away in the background, one loud-voiced little man addressed stentorian compliments to her majesty, which were perfectly audible, and highly appreciated by the inmates of the stalls.

She told us that the reason she was here to-night instead of at the Great Sahara, was because she had been compelled, owing to the disgraceful behaviour of its manager, to throw up her engagement only that very morning. Inquiry was made as to the nature of the manager's offence. "Oh," she said, impatiently, "it was always the same story—so unreasonable—so absurd; nobody else in the world, in fact, could possibly put up with half she had had to submit to from that man."

We all listened most respectfully to this statement, though some of us had heard something of the same sort before, with regard to other men, for her majesty was somewhat celebrated for her quarrels and law-suits. A misguided young fellow present, observed,—

"You often quarrel with your managers, don't you?"

"They quarrel with me," she replied. "I cannot be expected to suffer every insult and indignity, can I?"

We all indignantly declared that she had suffered far too much as it was.

"At any rate, Mr. Russet will have to do without me to-night."

"He can't," said Little Addleton, "he'll break down to a certainty."

"I'm sorry for him, that's all," her majesty replied; "I suppose they'll get Panglass to read the part, or poor dear old Montflummerie. I wonder how they'll dress the character? I ordered my dresses from Paris; I wouldn't wear any of Russet's rubbish. Mine cost over three thousand francs. Grevin gave me the designs."

We all, in chorus, expressed our conviction that the dresses must be very beautiful.

"Yes, they're well enough," she said, "and after all the expense, I cannot help thinking that it is very ungentlemanly of Russet."

We all agreed that Russet was no gentleman. However, the loss would be his.

"You see," said Ann, with a smile, "he has so often disappointed the public. In fact, he scarcely ever keeps a promise when he makes one. I should not wonder at all if the public did not some day tear up his benches."

We agreed that it was no more than Russet ought to expect. I am not quite sure that there was any proposition in the world, possible or impossible, that we should not have readily agreed to, had it emanated from the same source. I will not go as far as to say that we truckled somewhat humbly to this imperious beauty; but it must be admitted we were singularly unanimous in our assent to whatever she was pleased to observe.

I have said beauty. Perhaps that is a mistake. She was not a beauty; certainly I never heard any other lady allow that she had a perfect feature in her face. She was "so made up," the other ladies at the theatre protested. Anyone with that quantity of paint on must look pretty, they all agreed. She was one of those who attract the eyes of all the men among the audience, and the men—a spiritless sex, when argued with by the other and superior sex, were generally too cowardly to defend their opinion. Besides, it was decidedly not a high style of beauty, and to admire it must betoken an imperfect judgment.

Some who sought for an excuse, in an unguarded moment

of enthusiasm, after expressing their unqualified admiration, said,

"It is not so much the face as the general effect. There is an air, a style, *é je ne sais quoi.*"

Endeavouring to describe what this *je-ne-sais-quoishness* consisted of, some of these gentlemen explained that the air and style they alluded to did not depend upon the richness of the attire. "A simple muslin dress and a simple blue ribbon," they were fond of saying,—and this is the idea of most men about women's clothes. Simplicity and neatness are, they pretend, the most desirable attributes of a pretty toilet. But ladies themselves know the difference between a rich simplicity and a poor one. There is a simplicity of satin and velvet which will give a *piquante* air to the plainest featured; but it costs a good deal of money.

Ann's dress was generally remarkable by the costliness of its details. The effect to a man's eyes was simplicity itself, and the very best taste. Only the women noticed the long drooping earrings loaded with diamonds; the profusion of rings and bracelets, and the necklace of glittering gems.

While the little court was yet sitting, the curtain rose on the burlesque, and we were all dismissed to our places. I heard Addleton talking to a friend as they walked away together:

"She looks more at her ease in that box than in another we once saw her in, eh?"

"Ah! she owes you more than she thinks for. It was you who first took the matter up, was it not?"

"Of course it was. These things are so soon forgotten. If I had not made a *cause célèbre* of it by my articles in the *Bomb-shell*."

"And that Methodist preacher sort-of-fellow, what was his name? that you wrote that tremendous smasher about. Let's see, what was he called? something like Railway?"

"Bradshaw."

"Ah, to be sure. What has become of him?"

"He fell all at once as quickly as he had risen. He has been dead about a couple of years. I suppose hardly anybody remembers him."

"Not they. Who remembers anything now-a-days? I myself forget who it really was who killed poor what's-his-name—Thing-em-bob that our friend there was tried about."

"Jarman, was it not? A sort of madman I always thought him. Didn't you, Yolland?"

"Must have been," said the gentleman appealed to. "I suppose he had, though, mad or sane, scraped together a tolerably large fortune. He left every penny of it to her, I believe."

"Yes; she came out of that affair pretty well, all things considered. She is about the richest woman there is on the stage."

"I wonder she is on the stage at all. She seems to give her managers a good deal of trouble."

"I suppose it is because she does that they are so fond of her. There's not another woman alive with double her talents and good looks, that they would stand her tricks from. It's wonderful what luck some people have."

"Silence! there in front," cried somebody from the front row of the pit behind them, and the gentlemen held their tongues, and listened to the wit and humour. Presently, my friend Sm*th pulled my arm and pointed to the box opposite. There I saw a baldheaded gentleman looking very hot and excited, endeavouring to make some explanation to which Ann would not listen.

"Isn't that Russet?"

"Yes."

"He's come to beg her on his bended knees to go and play at his theatre to-night."

"And she won't."

"Not she."

"But he seems to be using strong arguments. Perhaps he's offering to double her salary."

"That's like Russet, who would beat a ballet girl down to the utmost farthing."

"See, she listens favourably. How fast he is talking! She is looking at her watch. He is looking at his."

"She won't go, though."

"Yes, she will."

"She has risen."

"She is leaving the box on his arm."

"What do you say to leaving the rest of the burlesque unseen and running round to the other theatre to see her come on?"

"Let's stop another scene to give her time to dress, and then we'll rush over in a Hansom."

It was one of those triumphs, the papers said next day, which are so rare on the modern stage. The welcome accorded to the favourite actress was perfectly overwhelming. For many minutes she was unable to speak, but stood bowing her acknowledgments to the repeated bursts of applause.

How Russet must have cursed her beneath his breath, although he smiled so sweetly. Afterwards he was heard to say—

“That woman is the most heartless, selfish, ungrateful alive. What do the public see in her, I should like to know? She shall never again act at my theatre. Crowded houses every night, do you say? Yes, that’s all very well, but look what she costs me.”

Nevertheless, in spite of this resolve, he engaged her again before the year was out, having lost a mint of money by somebody else in the meantime.

We stayed out the burlesque opening, my friend and I, and I never saw Ann to greater advantage. Every dance and song of hers were loudly encored, every speech applauded to the echo. When the Harlequinade was about half over, and we were standing under the pillars of the front entrance, her brougham passed by, and she nodded and smiled to us. A ragged rascal, who early in the evening, probably, had been selling bills, and was now touting for odd jobs—hailing cabs, opening the doors, and the like—caught sight of her, and ran by the side, touching the brim of his greasy hat, and whining out his little story.

“Good-evening to you, Miss! A happy new year to you, Miss. You haven’t forgot me, Miss, I’m sure. Pickering, Miss; don’t you remember? Happy to drink your health, Miss. Thank you kindly. God bless you.”

Next moment the darkness of night had swallowed her up. She faded from our view as she will fade presently from the recollection of the reader who a moment hence lays down this volume. Our last glimpse of her is of a bright face and a merry smile. Perhaps when she had leant back and closed the window, with the recollection of the life that was gone for ever, and the love that lay for ever dead, some bitter tears rose to her eyes.

For my part I cannot bear to think of her thus, alone in the world, with those who loved her, and whom she

loved all dead. I like to think of her best as she appears at night in the lighted theatre, when the overture has ceased, and the curtain rises, and she comes forward, bright and flashing with a joyous laugh—a laugh that rings in my memory now as I lay down my pen.

THE END.

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